

7-16-2003

Developing Organizational Development: Alienation and Organizing in the Age of Information

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DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
ALIENATION AND ORGANIZING IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Date of Approval:
July 16, 2003

Keywords: dialogue, subjectivity, alienation, identity, reflexivity

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Robert D. Kreisher

ABSTRACT

Modernism is characterized by alienation from one's self and the processes by which one's self gets constructed. Organizational development (OD) is an activity that attempts to address the experience of work and to transform the historical alienation.

OD practitioners are often optimistic that this transformation is possible and even is happening in the day-to-day work of OD. A group of critics, mostly academics, are skeptical about whether any real transformation is possible, arguing that OD practices are misguided extensions of modernism. In one thread of the OD literature, authors build an argument for the centrality of issues of identity in achieving this transformation. Proponents of this perspective argue that dialogic processes of reflection and co-construction are vital to participating in the production of one's self.

In this study, I used participant-observation and interview approaches to investigate the ways OD consultants make sense of their work. These approaches are managed through a perspective I call "first person," which aligns them with the dialogic principles of immediacy of presence; emergent, unanticipated consequences; collaborative orientation; vulnerability; and genuineness and authenticity.

I found among the OD consultants a shared value for dialogue, an appreciation for people who are engaged, a preoccupation with identity boundaries, a commitment to the greater good, an understanding of the personal benefits they receive from their work, and a concern for fear among their clients and in themselves. Many OD consultants have chosen their roles as independent or internal consultants to escape from modern constructions of identity prevalent in organizations. OD consulting is a practice situated among multiple interests, creating complex tensions of identity and action for OD

consultants. OD work itself requires consultants to be reflexive about their own and others' processes of identity construction.

OD consultants, when contrasted to critics of OD, show a tendency toward what Mikhail Bakhtin calls dialogue rather than dialectic. A dialogic orientation allows the OD consultants to work more productively on shaping the transition to postmodern consciousness. Reflexivity and self-participation are central to the success of an OD consultant. Education and professional groups should support greater understanding, inquiry, and practice of reflexivity and self-participation.

CHAPTER 1
ALIENATION AND WORK IN MODERN AND
POSTMODERN EXPERIENCE

Our moral responsibility is not to stop the future, but to shape it, . . . to channel our destiny in humane directions and to ease the trauma of transition. (Alvin Toffler, 1993, p. 3)

In this dissertation I argue, first, that organizational development (OD) is an expression of broader contemporary social and cultural trends (often labeled “postmodernism”). As an expression of this, OD is both being shaped by these trends as well as influencing them. Indeed, OD is one of many interpenetrating articulations of these contemporary social and cultural changes. Second, I argue that because of the unique characteristics of these contemporary social trends, OD practitioners are “identity-workers.” Hence, identity and reflexivity are special concerns in the day-to-day existence of OD practitioners. This self-scrutiny in OD is itself a special circumstance of these broad contemporary social and cultural changes.

Background and Significance of the Research Project

Typically, Americans spend eight hours or more each day, five days a week, at work. Assuming an average of eight hours of sleep each night, the remaining almost eight hours of each day are split among such activities as bathing, travel, reading, watching television, playing, and eating—some done alone, some done with a variety of friends, family, and strangers. For this reason, work is one of the most

consistent and continuous *places* in many peoples' lives. Much of what we learn about life, order, society, relationships, and possibilities is created and changed from within the template of work.

Of course, family, civic, spiritual, and virtual places are enormously significant. However, family, recreational, avocational, spiritual, and civic lives have always been vested, at least in our descriptions of them, with a greater level of dignity, intimacy, and interdependence than work. Work is idealized as the place that excludes all those other places. Those other places are where we go on "our own time." By implication, our time at work is somebody else's time, and we have no say in the matter. This is the means by which women, for example, have traditionally been excluded from the most esteemed realms of the world of work because of their "natural" obligations to their family (Kanter, 1977). Other "others" as well can be excluded when they fail to bring a rationalistic, reductionistic, "work" attitude to the job. At work we are to be one dimensional and incomplete, alienated from each other and from our selves. That's just the way it is.

Both the academic study of and lived experience of all facets of our lives often are deficient in recognizing and engaging complete human beings (Buber, 1970). However, nowhere has this deficiency in both inquiry and experience been so historically alienating as in our work lives. In reality, the experience of work is rich and diverse with many examples that run counter to or exclusive of my description in the above paragraph. Nonetheless, the collective flavor of our stories, legends,

myths, and heroes of work is consistent with my characterization of work as alienating and dissatisfying.

In the literature of a variety of related disciplines, much has been written about the subject matter of OD. There is also plenty written about postmodernism as well as the “new economy” and identity. A few works, including Zorn, Cheney, and Christensen’s booklet “Do We Really Want Constant Change?,” link postmodernism and the new economy with OD. Zorn et al. critique the popular OD theme of constant change by arguing that constant change privileges “seeming” to do something over “actually” doing something and also by aggravating the alienating anxiety of modernism by speeding up and multiplying on-the-job stressors. Zorn et al. argue that these activities are really sophisticated expressions of modernist sensibility. Thus, the privileging of change may inhibit change. Schein, Quick, and de Vries (2000) also add that the idea of “culture change” often ignores business and economic realities. Although both of these works will be instrumental in describing OD as a special example of postmodern relationships, neither of them speaks to the personal work of dealing with, and facilitating others’ attempts to deal with, the changes and circumstances encountered on the cusp of postmodernism.

From at least Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor, and their contemporaries onward, much of the rhetoric of managers, consultants, executives, and scholars has consciously centered on making work life narrower in an ongoing attempt to rationalize production and economy. “Working” is highly specialized and makes few demands on “workers” beyond the fact that they reliably repeat some tasks. This

remains a common refrain, even for managers. In a vertical, hierarchical organization (the mythical and mystical case of industrial organization regardless of the vagaries of its realization), seen as ideal for prediction and control, managers are depended on to handle information and decision-making—and to communicate—in a highly consistent and predictable manner. The increasing rationalization and conversion of these expectations into techniques gave birth to the discipline and practice of “management science” at the beginning of the 20th century (Schon, 1987). This is not offset by the fact that Henry Ford, for example, provided many life and community enhancing benefits such as health care, affordable housing, and the cleanest and safest industrial sites of his time or by a general trend toward increasing benefits and compensation in most sectors in the industrialized world. The experience of work may overlap slightly with social philanthropy and justice, but they are not the same thing.

As management science has developed, so has the companion profession of OD. OD is a profession dedicated to managing the human dimensions of work. The OD professional’s task is to facilitate the experience of work as an intersection between practice and reflection. Viewed systemically, the OD professional can embody a dialogue between the lived experience of real individual workers and the conceptual orientation of management studies. However, it would be quite a gloss to stop there in describing the relationship among management studies, OD, and work. Chapter 2 considers the profession of OD more deeply and fully.

Production of a Self

To understand my fascination with OD, I have to turn back the clock more than twenty years. Growing up and living in the *original* auto town, Indianapolis, the son of a Ford Motor Company employee and a public school teacher, I was raised in one of the holy lands of the industrialism that built the United States's prosperity and national identity. It was the heartland of industrialism and modernist values. However, this was not to last for long. I have seen my world transformed in my still young lifetime. My high school, one of the wealthiest and best funded in its state, had six computers. They were housed in a closet at the side of the "media" center and were the territory of pre-Microsoft/Macintosh techies (we called them geeks, dorks, and nerds—epithets completely lacking the reverence of the contemporary "computer geek"). But by the time I was a sophomore in college, just a few years later, my university was filled with public access labs, and I was expected to learn to use the computers in them. I was a teenager when my neighborhood got cable. I was in high school by the time MTV began. My high school was all white. We had two minority students (out of about 1200). They were Korean. It was suburbia.

Growing up in this environment I learned that making money was good and people who made money were good (and good people made money). I learned that bosses were bad. Being your own boss was good but few people were. I learned that nobody really likes his or her job. I learned from the tone of voice with which people uttered the phrase "the real world" that growing up was something to be feared. But, if you were wise, you didn't admit that it scared you, especially if you were a boy

because you didn't have the option of "marrying well." I learned that you live to consume and you work to consume (*ergo*, you live to work). I am sure there must have been contradictory information available to me somewhere. But, from an early age, I, like most of my peers, could recite the stories of unfairness, bureaucracy, alienation, and irrelevance I had heard from my parents, in movies such as *Footloose* and *9 To 5*, at school, and from other places. Indeed, we enacted these stories in conspicuously mock (but never mocking) terms in confrontations with our parents, teachers, administrators, and so on. Additionally, I could recite the acquiescent stories of opposition and injustice with the resignation of a native. I could believe in them. I could walk the walk. I could force them on others—at least, most of the time. But they also frightened me. I did not want to become them, although I really could not have articulated why. With mixtures of denial and defiance, I set off to college.

As an undergraduate, I imagined myself to be a critic, a rebel, and an outsider. My particular little insulated corner of organizational communication focused largely on critical approaches. This suited me much better than the mindless efficiency of the management courses (the students of which I secretly envied for that same efficiency), so I told myself.

Eventually, I came to believe that the "outside" critic was impotent to do anything, even to get people (other than the proverbial "choir") to listen. I also eventually recognized that it was arrogant of me to think that I could stand in a privileged position where I could see what was wrong with "them" without being

involved with (and becoming) “them.” About this same time, I was also hearing, in the stories of “insiders,” an indication that many of them also were frustrated with the state of things.

Along with these personal transitions came a series of random opportunities to apply my critical abilities to consulting of the type typically labeled “organizational development.” I can’t say when and where I became enabled to be an “insider” or exactly how this happened. But I am aware that “inside” and “outside” are very fluid characteristics that always depend on context, mood, and other intangibles. I am also aware that OD work seems to heighten this fluidity and call on practitioners to be very skillful at negotiating boundaries. This sort of introspection and self-interrogation led me, as much as anything, to a general interest in how OD practitioners negotiate “in” and “out” and “with” and “against.”

I didn’t know it at the time, but as I began to fear what was coming, began to rise up against it and oppose it, I became fully modern. I was alienated from myself. As I began to become aware of the futility of the type of opposition in which I was engaged and sought out participative and facilitative approaches, I began to become postmodern. I am not that unusual in the world, struggling on the cusp between modern and postmodern subjectivities.

These are the elements of my background that relate to this research. When I started to investigate OD and OD practitioners, I have no doubt that these experiences directed my attention toward alienation, identity and modernity and postmodernity. It could also be argued that I was drawn to OD because of the centrality of these things

to OD. Nonetheless, I developed the theoretical context that follows in this chapter as a response to observing and interviewing OD professionals. I developed and began to articulate this theoretic orientation after my research began. It could be said that this theoretic context was inspired by the research.

Working on Postmodernism

The title of this section has a double meaning. First, it suggests that the central intent of this chapter is to conceptualize work in a postmodern world. Second, the title suggests an activist's stance of "working on" postmodernism, shaping and influencing it. It asks where are we now and where might we be able to go. The concept of alienation offers great potential as a lens for asking these two questions. Once one of Marx's most important concepts, alienation was somewhat discarded with vulgar materialism (Heroux, 1998). Nonetheless, some of its elements can be demonstrated to be vibrant and useful not only for theorizing the meanings of work but also for working in a postmodern/information/global age.

Postmodernism is far from an agreed upon issue. However, one prominent structural template or motif for thinking about postmodernism can be found at work. It would be naïve to say that the structure of work determines the structure of society. Many different mutually constituting relationships were required to produce modernity. Inevitably the same must be true for postmodernity. It is in our work lives that structures or motifs of relating are most clearly prescribed, homogenized, and reified as "the way it is." It is work that people mean when they talk about being out in "the *real* world." However, work is our most extensive and personal,

embodied, and perhaps most important and unavoidable experience of these relationships. Not only has the organization of work and production been at the center of thinking about alienation since Marx first connected the two, a majority of most people's time, excluding sleep is spent working. Civic and public life have declined to such an extent that work is increasingly our only shared place of ongoing human contact outside of the family (Oldenburg, 1999).

Work, Modernism, and Alienation

Marx said that the industrial revolution and capitalism alienated workers from the resources and outcomes of their labor—this is true to a degree that perhaps even he may not have anticipated. Through specialization and commodification, capitalism and industrialization turn processes into things. Previously, processes—production of food, clothing, and shelter—connected ends and means. Additionally, much of the rest of people's lives were in support of these activities of production, including family planning, rituals, governance, etc.

People were directly involved in the production of their possessions to a substantial degree (their labor did not come back to them “transformed”). Trade and production within a community were organic because even if an individual had nothing directly to do with the production of something (or consumption of it) he or she knew where it came from or went and could experience the relationships involved in producing it. It is doubtful that a society of totally self-sufficient individuals ever did exist. It has always been the case that our processes of production and distribution of things were opportunities for human contact and occasions for the

production of identity. On the other hand, trade with people from other areas, and even with those of other countries and continents, often existed, but was not the primary mode of relating for most people, most of the time.

No longer can we relate to most of our material circumstances as both producers and consumers. We have become consumers—actors involved in a perpetual relationship to our world as an object. Not only is our world an object to us, but also we are objects to our world. Most workers today are involved in the “production” of a very small range of products or services (which often they may not even use). And within that production process, workers are involved in only a very narrow range of the activities of that particular production.

Specialization and commodification erased this dual relationship. Marx’s point all along was not that collectives of totally self-sufficient individuals existed who produced and consumed only their own goods, but rather that communities were small enough that people could experience their connection to each other and their products. In this way, to them everything seemed part of a whole. Industrial organization is the antithesis of this kind of community where processes have been broken down into very small, disconnected actions and then multiplied to a greater quantity than is reasonably imaginable by human beings. The problem here is not so much the disconnection from the products of one’s labor as it is the disconnection from those around us. At the height of modernism, we didn’t know what the work of others around us had to do with us or anything else (or vice versa). Living in isolation is the mirror of working in isolation.

It is very difficult to see organic relationships among things in this mode of relating. Our world appears to us as a synthetic and hyperreal collection of unrelated objects (Baudrillard, 1994). People are among this bricolage. Alienation is a symptom or manifestation of a way of relating. Martin Buber (1970) calls this way of relating “I-It,” a way of relating to people and things as objects. It may not be a coincidence that Buber first expressed concern over the proliferation of I-It about 50 years after Marx first wrote about alienation. Rather than an issue of labor, though, alienation is an issue of identity and human contact. Industrialization robbed us of our processes and gave us *things*.

The Renewed Debate on Alienation and Postmodernism

As the Internet, cable, and other technologies have exponentially increased the number of channels of information, as well as diversified the kinds of information available, a debate has developed about the relationship between alienation and a society organized around information rather than production. One argument is that access to information will democratize the society through equal access and by flattening hierarchical structures will inspire spontaneous communities. The much-flaunted example of this is online or virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993). Management, too, has its examples of this sort of optimism. “Postmanagement” has been used to refer to the possibility that postmodernism will eventually erase the need for management as a separate function of work—a sort of anti-Cartesian split without identity as a “laborer” or “manager” (Gephart, 1996). The opposing argument is that the consolidation of ownership, globalization, and commodification

of information will add yet another level of colonization and commodification to technocratic capitalism (Roszak, 1994). With new communication technologies, “mystification of value and the reification of social relations into things (or images) simply speeds up” (Heroux, 1998, p. 109).

Looked at in these terms, these competing explanations put alienation in a status quo as a result of the movement toward globally organizing around information and technology. A little is gained here; a little is lost there. However, one way out of this dead-end debate (certainly both arguments seem valid) is to say that the status of alienation is continuing to emerge. Indeed, last words on a subject can be said only in the moment before people cease to care about and be influenced by that subject. Thus closure can never be declared; in fact, it can hardly be noticed. Thus, we are *in the midst* of determining how alienation in the postmodern age of globalism and information will play out. As such, rather than asking of the global information age what closure it puts on the issue of alienation, we should ask what kinds of openings it suggests in regard to alienation.

Reconceiving Alienation for the Global Information Age

Alienation is a separation between human activity and its own products; it is also a situation where our products come back to us as something separate; it is a separation from active participation in the social production of values, from awareness, from oneself, from nature, from use-values, from the process of labor, from that work we do in order to produce ourselves; and it is a separation from each other. (Heroux, 1998, p. 108)

The industrial revolution and capitalism alienated workers from the resources and outcomes of their labor. Through specialization and commodification, capitalism

and industrialization turned processes into things. People were directly involved in the production of their possessions to a substantial degree. Their production did not come back to them “transformed” (e.g., receiving a piece of paper saying a specific amount of money has been directly deposited into your account in exchange for your labor). No longer is this direct involvement common. Our activities and experiences seem increasingly fragmented and disconnected from other activities and experiences (Baudrillard, 1994). Alienation, thus, is a companion to the way of relating that Buber calls “I-It” (1970).

Orientation to a common goal has seldom been realized in industrial organization. Industrial organizations stereotypically have very few people dictating purposes and goals to others. The result is a collectivity where the company’s goals (or rather, the goals of a small constituency representing and represented by “the company”) are at odds with a bunch of individuals’ goals (which often are also at odds with each other—alienation does not take homogenous forms and Marx’s “proletariat” as a functional category has been somewhat abandoned as a result). Hence, few opportunities remain for the performance of community.

Industrialization relieved many people of worry about subsistence. The associated hierarchical and bureaucratic organization, often attributed to Weber, also brought opportunity by reducing nepotism and creating a system of standardization (Perrow, 1986). However, industrialization did very little to provide structure for engaging the existential possibilities it creates. Outside of work, social structures have evolved ranging from charitable and professional to hobby and civic based.

Some even are about work, such as labor unions and professional interest or social groups. However, often we still feel detached, uninspired, and unappreciated—alienated from our past and not yet able to imagine a coherent future.

Today many lament our “consumer” society and feel an existential dis-ease because many believe that the bottom line is all that counts. Regardless of reality, we have come to mythologize work life as being entirely instrumental to the extent that someone will gripe about being “just a number” and then turn around and notify 15 employees that they have been “down-sized.” It is not that this fictional manager is a hypocrite in need of being taught some morals. Indeed, she would most likely rationalize her move as being dictated from above, as requiring her compliance, as being out of her hands. And, probably, she would be absolutely right. The problem of alienation is systemic and interpersonal, but not personal.

Cynicism is often expressed about this state of affairs. Some Marxists warn that alienation is a necessary outcome of capitalism that demands its end. Liberals typically invoke coercive mechanisms to mitigate its effects, and conservatives minimize and deny its effects or argue for a different cause (such as a deterioration in “family values”). Nevertheless, most will agree that western culture is to some degree fragmented (characterized by a degree of separation *and* disconnectedness) (Eisenberg, Andrews, Murphy, & Laine-Timmerman, (1999). Therefore, although the problems of postmodern culture are widespread and systemic, one prominent structural template or motif for these problems can be found at work. I say at “work,”

rather than “in the economy” because individuals do not perform “the economy.” They do, however, perform “work” daily and for a huge percentage of their lives.

Rather than being a question of essential human nature as the latter Marx conceived it, alienation can be an issue of organic relationships among human beings and between human beings and the organization of society and work. This is the issue as the early Marx conceived it (Heroux, 1998, p. 108). Alienation, as construed by Heroux, has elements of both humanism and posthumanism. It is humanist by virtue of the assumption that production, in terms of *labor*, must necessarily have its means connected to its ends. But also it is posthumanist in its concern for separation “from that work we do in order to produce ourselves; and . . . separation from each other” (Heroux, 1998, p. 108). This expresses a concern for how human existence occurs but it does not assume a particular fundamental human nature. Marx’s humanistic assumptions about labor were a specific expression of his broader notion of laboring with others to produce oneself.

The relationship of a person to the production of his or her own identity and experiences is an issue of specific social structures and processes of relating to oneself and others. Heidegger (1962) follows, and perhaps focuses, Marx in elucidating a concern that modern subjects develop essentialized, “always already present” relationships to things, others, and themselves. This amounts to a paucity of the kind of communication that continually constructs identities and relationships. Thus, what is left of Marx’s “alienation” after we remove humanistic notions is, quite simply, alienation from communicating. Thus, we should inquire not of political

economies but of identities and their production. Alienation becomes a question of relationships among humans, not between humans and the products of their physical labor. Even the question of one's relationship to the products of one's physical labor can only come to mean anything in the interhuman process of sense-making.

It is in this remaining dimension of alienation that I find the possibility to expand the question of a global information age and alienation beyond the stalemated debate described at the beginning of this section. Part and parcel of seeking that possibility is to exorcise "alienation" of its humanistic-essentialist connotations. Thus understood, alienation, as I will use it, is about human contact and the production of identity. Seen this way, alienation is an issue of involvement and recognition (Fukuyama, 1995), as well as of values and ethics (Taylor, 1991), not a question of economic rationality.

Finding an Opening

In addition to separating workers from the resources and outcomes, as well as the surplus value of their labor, industrialization and capitalism separated people from their immediate survival needs by making *things* available on command. This "thingness" is part and parcel of the alienation associated with postmodernism (Baudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1984). Things separated us from each other and from the fundamental work of producing ourselves in dialogue with one another (Bakhtin, 1986). In short, "things" disrupted our way of organizing. Far from needing to return to a former way of organizing, however, we need to find a way of organizing organically (is it any wonder those two words share a root?).

To be alienated from something inherently means not to be present with it. And, in order to be alienated from something, it must be in some way both familiar and meaningful. Therefore, to speak of a general state of alienation means that our very foundations for sense-making have become alien to us. We are alienated from sense.

Luhmann (1977) says that familiarity and meaning are the antithesis of complexity. Thus, if industrial organization and capitalism are alienating in their complexity and impersonality, alienation at least opens up new possibilities by increasing complexity and multiplying options. The existential dis-ease typically associated with alienation may be the result of a lack of anything to replace the old—a lack of structures for enacting meaning. Without such, there is a void of meaning in existence, and there is little to work toward. But in its wake remains possibility.

The specific example of alienation for which Marx is famous contains the germ of its own undoing. In pre-industrial societies, communities were cohesive specifically because they had a common goal to work toward—their survival. I won't romanticize pre-industrial society by suggesting that it was all harmonious and cohesive without brutality and inequality. I doubt it ever was. What I am arguing is that there existed a common code that made joint action possible (Shotter, 1994). In fact, modernism itself was predicated on at least the illusion of a unifying common code, or what Lyotard (1984) called a grand metanarrative. However, in the global information age, the scope of a shared code is shrinking, both in terms of the number of people a shared code may encompass and its persistence through time. Also,

instead of a single grand metanarrative, there is a proliferation of shared codes (such that many are not shared across group “boundaries”). Gergen (1991) calls this proliferation of codes “social saturation.” The proliferation is occurring to such an extent that Gergen (1991) says, “rationality is in recession,” meaning that we frequently fail to find others to be rational because we increasingly encounter individuals operating in different social and moral codes (Luhmann, 1998; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Taylor, 1991).

Alienation persists because we haven’t figured out how to share purposes (which is the foundation of collaboration). Ever since the invention of work as something outside of our lives, ever since we started punching the clock and checking in and checking out, work has been mystified as outside of our personal lives. In an idealized modern, industrial world, we literally leave our selves at the door when we enter our workplace (and leave work at the door when we go home). Of course, we all know this is not possible, and many are beginning to realize it is not even desirable. However, modernism was built on the illusion of a shared rationalization that resulted in the separation of work from existence. Perrow (1986) argues that bureaucracy, “centraliz[es] power in society and legitimat[es] or disguis[es] that centralization” (p. 5). As a society, we have done so much work building this belief into our culture in the form of archetypes and myths that much work is required to change it. In fact, until fairly recently, the demands of maintaining the illusion have prevented most of us from even talking about it or inquiring into it.

It is well established that industrial society is waning and that we are entering an “information age” or a “technocracy”; modernism has been giving way to postmodernism. Many commentators and critics look around and see this as something that has happened already. However, regardless of what structural elements seem to be present, it is only through interaction that consciousness is constructed. Those who gleefully or woefully conclude that we are living in a postmodern world are not paying attention to human interactions themselves. The paradigm example of work is shifting from rationalized processes for producing physical products to collaborating across many boundaries (corporate, physical, professional, class, national, race, gender, etc.) to optimize and enhance a flow of information in some fashion (Block, 1994; Chawla & Renesch, 1995; Deetz, 1995a; Senge, 1991; Wheatley, 1993). It is more important that this is the sense that is made of a change from industrial to information society/economy than to assess what the actual basis for believing this may be. It should not be seen as contradictory to note that hundreds of millions of people are still involved in the production of physical products in the U.S. and worldwide.

Nonetheless, as production became more and more highly rationalized in modernism, workers became divided between those who work physically and those who work mentally. This dualism, paradigmatic of industrial organization, has always been linked to alienation; however it is becoming increasingly less viable for three reasons. First, the line is blurring between physical and mental labor in the information age. Many of the “products” of our economy are not primarily produced

by “physical” labor (consider computer software, telecommunications, credit, etc.). Indeed, production never was exclusively a physical endeavor. The difference between then and now is that the Tayloristic mystifications of work that reified production as merely physical are not coherent with the emerging forms of production. Mystification of this dualism is becoming increasingly less viable. Thus the stories that sustained the illusion of a rational detached worker are losing their narrative coherence.

Second, many of the emerging forms of work are inherently collaborative in form. The complexity of creating a software program, providing telecommunications services, or processing credit records is so great that many diverse people must work together in order to “produce” them. This process cannot be rationalized, reduced, or prescribed in anything remotely approaching its entirety. Further, they involve contingencies much greater than traditional manufacturing. Both of these things were, of course, true before—production has always been complex and contingent. But the evolving society has multiplied the complexity and contingency until they are undeniable.

Finally, doing business today, even as a relatively small-scale entrepreneurship, involves contact with people of widely varying beliefs, values, and life-styles. The old mystifications revolved around gender and race/ethnicity. The assumption evolved that people of the same race/ethnicity and gender would share a code. Whether this assumption will endure, it is increasingly less viable to assume that this sort of alignment can be maintained. The need for individuals to work with

difference and make *in situ* decisions demystifies the dualism and lays bare the last bit of the illusion.

Add to this the effects of the changes in technologies that allow (or demand) people to be increasingly in touch or present with one another, and we truly have complexity that defies even the sharpest human intellect to account for it in an instrumental, predict-and-control manner (Maturana & Varela, 1987). However, this, too, has probably always been the case. The interpersonal demands of modern organizing described above have made transparent the historical mystifications of work as rational and impersonal that have been perpetrated by organizational gurus, executives, media, and workers. The schism of mind/body that pervaded modern work can no longer be maintained¹.

This breakdown in traditional mystifications suggests an opportunity, an opening. The current condition may pose a possibility for new objectives, new purposes, and new places to create meaning. In the movement toward ways of organizing based on knowledge and information, the possibility of grappling with identity, esteem, learning, spirituality, community, and relationships has *begun* to replace the agrarian and pre-industrial places and performances of meaning whose disappearance concerned Marx. Dealing with these issues has the potential to create processes and structures that resolve the dichotomy between fairness and cohesiveness. No business, if it wished to stay “in business” for long, would accept

¹ Bennis (1969) began to urge OD practice because of similar arguments about the veneer of modernism wearing thin.

these existential issues as a purpose (Schein et al., 2000). However, businesses that see these things as necessarily intertwined with the process of doing business will feel compelled to take them seriously (and are).

In terms of Kant's categorical imperative, the changes occurring in the way we organize may be said to open up the possibility of becoming more fully human because they lay bare the dehumanizing processes we have been enduring. Marx argued that industrialization and capitalism wiped out much of the extant basic purpose for existence (and thus the *way* of existence) that had more or less persisted in some form since the beginning of human communities. If so, industrialization thereby wiped out much of human community by removing the place of and the reason for performance of community. But we could not go back to that even if we wanted to (and many do), so amelioration *must* be made in terms of today's realities. It has always been in the communal pursuit of some objective that human existence can happen. Thus the end matters not so much as the process. But a purpose must exist and be shared to some extent (even if that purpose is to find some purpose) in order to enable a process. Whereas, in the past, "shared" meant a more universal sharing, in terms of production and survival, "shared," as I am using it here, may be very local, temporally as well as physically. I am referring to shared processes and purposes (intentional plural), not shared meanings. Also, "sharing" is something that is achieved, not found. That process of achievement is what industrialization destroyed (by giving purposes and processes rather allowing their discovery) and what current cultural trends offer some possibility of redoing.

Human communities are resilient enough that they have persisted through industrialization and capitalism to such an extent that society's deficiency in community is readily apparent and much discussed in public and professional discourses. Communities pop up all over the place without people ever really meaning for them to. This does not suggest the return of a grand narrative in terms of a culturally shared purpose for or at work. Before the industrial revolution, communities may have shared, to some degree, some basic goal of survival. But there was huge variation in the way communities enacted this basic goal. And the narrative is in the telling, not the purpose for telling. Today, the possibilities for community are moral and aesthetic, centered on community for its own sake. What is emerging is the possibility of coordinating. This could not and should not result in the same story for everyone. What it may result in, however, are localized structures that enable people to story their existence at work as one of involvement, belonging, and commitment—an existence that engages them and is engaged by them. In short, it *may* result in an existence less characterized by alienation and more shaped by community.

Conclusion

Many of these changes in contemporary social circumstances are being addressed in contemporary organizations. The language varies widely, as does the style of intervention. This trend is epitomized by the “learning organization” movement in the 1990s (Chawla & Renesch, 1995; Senge, 1991) as well as “spirituality,” “dialogue,” and other managerial and organizational development

trends (Kreisher, 1999). But these changes are not value-free. In addition to optimism about the prospects, these trends have been criticized as constituting an unreflective management fashion (Zorn et al. 1999), furthering corporate colonization of employees' lives (Cox, 1999; Grugulis, 1999; Hatcher, 1999), and conflating organizational goals with employees' goals (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992; Fincham & Clark, 2001). In short, some are concerned that the existing structures of modernism may persist in these very efforts to move away from modernism.

In addition, much of the focus of these emerging managerial movements is instrumental in that they value human development and belonging for the sake of something else (various general or specific definitions of performance, effectiveness or success) rather than valuing human development itself. It is clear that organizations, scholars, workers, and consultants are responding to the changes in contemporary culture described here. What is not yet clear is whether this response will further consolidate the conditions of alienation or will yet find ways to transcend them. Nonetheless, mindfulness of how alienation arises is necessary if we are to find opportunities in our current circumstances.

This mindfulness is now driving and trying to take over much of OD. In the next chapter, I examine the current climate of OD. It is characterized by a sharp contrast between those who are optimistic that alienation can be and is being transcended through contemporary approaches to training, development, and facilitation and those who see these efforts as at best falling short and at worst as extending and worsening the circumstances of alienation. At the center of this

disagreement about the prospects of OD is the question of perspective. The naysayers look at the structural realities and the optimists at human interactions.

CHAPTER 2
A TALE OF TWO MOODS:
OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM IN THE IMAGININGS OF
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most working Americans have experience with organizational development. Few, however, know its name. OD traditionally has been associated with organizational objectives. However, OD is increasingly concerned with employees' objectives as well. OD is the direct efforts of a company to develop its employees. Often it gets identified with training, although it is certainly not reducible to that. It is often justified by arguing that, when done well, it results in companies that are more responsive, flexible, resilient; companies that make better decisions; and, even, companies that are more profitable. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, it grew into a profession with degrees awarded and positions advertised, with consulting practices that are dedicated to it, and with professional organizations that specialize in it and certify its practitioners.

An increasing proportion of the work that is done under the rubric of "OD" is taking up the cause of social transformation outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I describe two moods toward these efforts to transform work. One is

optimistic about the changes that can take place; the other is more pessimistic, doubting that the available means of effecting these changes can succeed. Before describing these two moods, I will supply some historical and conceptual background on OD.

The Origins of Organizational Development

By the early twentieth century, the industrial revolution had created the means to manufacture and market *en masse*. Marx had been concerned decades earlier that workers were becoming alienated by the “massing” of society through consumerism and the capitalization of resources. Capitalization, the process of amassing relatively large amounts of capital in one “place,” led, according to Marx, to exploitation and alienation (Grieves, 2000). The separation of individuals from the processes by which things are produced (now too large to be experienced on the individual level) was literally an alienation from life—all things and no processes left people without an organic relationship to things.

Decades after Marx’s death, modernism extended its alienating scale to the experience of work itself. Scientific reductionism, the fuel of both manufacturing and marketing in this era, was beginning to turn toward the human resources of a company.

This new organizational enlightenment had developed mass production and consumption and now had to humanise it. The new behavioural science approaches, including personality and skills testing, were recruited to assist the development of a new type of person who would be organizationally committed and moulded by the needs of the corporation and whose life in the organization was routine and largely unemotional. (Grieves, 2000, p. 347)

The unwitting assumption of the scientific method applied to management was that performance could be improved by removing emotion, spirit, morality, religion, and personal life from work. What remained after this reduction would be a perfectly rational intellect capable of making logical decisions without failure (and a body under complete control of that intellect). Thus, OD's history is rooted in scientific management, rather than being oppositional to it (Grieves, 2000).

Grieves states unequivocally that “the roots of organizational development are located within the concepts of alienation and anomie” (p. 348). However, he goes on to say that in the middle of the twentieth century OD did not move past the modernist assumptions of linear progress that permeated scientific management. Researchers and practitioners sought change from a humanistic perspective because of “the problems of alienation associated with the application of production-line technology and the potential anomic effects of ‘associational’ rather than traditional ‘communal’ relationships expressed by Durkheim and Simmel” (Grieves, 2000, p. 347).

Durkheim added the concept of “anomie” to Marx’s “alienation.” Anomie literally means “nameless” and connotes someone displaced not so much physically, as emotionally and spiritually. However, researchers trying to mitigate alienation did so within the frame of associational relationships dictated by modernism. Thus, more humane workplaces were justified by an assumed positive correlation between humane workplaces and productive workplaces. A humane workplace was one more “thing” made by processes separated, through time and space, and by an inhuman

scale, from actual people. The making of things and, more importantly, relationships to things rather than processes is central to modernism.

The Turn Toward Communication

The growth of this field and profession throughout the closing decades of the twentieth century involves a turn toward communication as the central process of organizing. As the attention of scholars, managers, and consultants turns toward communication, they are coming to the conclusion that, as David Whyte (1994) argues, companies ask not too much of their employees, as Taylorism suggested, but too little (or perhaps it is this realization that fosters the interest in communication). Organizational life, as traditionally conceived, may ask too little in the sense that only a narrow range of people's abilities are engaged by most aspects of corporate life. Indeed, the stories that are told that make up the culture of corporations often actively discount and exclude many aspects of human existence that lie outside a narrow range (Helgesen, 1995, 1995b; Kanter, 1977; Kondo, 1990). Corporate life *can*, it is argued, engage workers as emoting, spiritual, cognizing people enmeshed in multiple networks of relationships.

Much inquiry about how to transform organizational cultures to support this broad engagement is beginning to occur. And, as communication is the process whereby organizational realities are produced, maintained, negotiated, and transformed (Eisenberg, Murphy, & Andrews, 1998), communication is central to any inquiry into organizing (Argyris, 1993; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Schein et al., 2000). Among the earliest mentions of OD, communication plays prominently. Bennis

(1969), who called it “organization development,” proposed “open and authentic” communication as opposed to “guarded and cautious” communication as a goal for OD (p. 3). Goldhaber (1974) included two chapters on OD in his *Organizational Communication* textbook.

Interest has grown exponentially throughout the last half of the twentieth century in expanding the range of human abilities engaged by work as well as increasing the involvement of workers in determining their material conditions and having a feel for participating in the production and reproduction of their culture. Whether this interest is attributable to the transition to an information/knowledge-based society or is simply a corollary is unclear, but probably not important. That the transition to an information/knowledge-based society coincides with a turn toward communication is notable enough when we are considering the implications for alienation. It is enough to say that communication matters.

Dialogic Organizational Development: An Optimistic Mood

Before discussing the implications for alienation of a transition to an information/knowledge-based society, it is necessary, first, to delineate just what sorts of organizational practices pertain to this issue and are therefore the focus of this study. Organizational development (OD) is a many faceted professional and academic (these are by no means distinct) field that has come into existence as a distinct entity in the last three or four decades. OD, especially when training is included, as it often is, may include issues not relevant to this study, such as business strategy, human resource procedures, expatriation/repatriation,

international/intercultural communication, problem-solving strategy, time management, business skills acquisition (such as software use), recruitment and retention, and others.

Nonetheless, a significant body of OD work pertains directly to the problem of alienation in an information/knowledge-based society. This body of OD work includes efforts to develop a broader range of human abilities in organizational life including attending to spirit, agency, freedom, and emotion; considering the impact of worker's lives, broadly defined, on their work, and vice versa; and an interest in what constitutes meaningful contact with others as well as in developing cognitive capacities. Many of these concerns overlap and some are meant to be umbrella terms. In addition, some are created by academics, some by professional consultants, and many arise through some combination of roles and/or individuals that defies characterization. However, the body of work has in common that each example seeks in some way to broaden organizational life to foster and support cultures that include a greater range of lived experience as being relevant to the process of organizing. They seek in their various ways to understand or develop processes for diverse individuals to act jointly and to do so by engaging them as whole persons rather than as rational, utility maximizing beings.

These programs and projects share a more or less *dialogic* quality in either a prescriptive or descriptive way or, sometimes, both. To treat dialogue descriptively means to say that dialogue is an essential characteristic of human contact; to treat it prescriptively is to say that there is a fundamental difference between monologue and

dialogue, and that dialogue should be sought out (Stewart & Zediker, 2000). In terms of organizations, some authors say organizational culture is inherently produced dialogically (e.g., Deetz, 1995b) and others say organizational culture *should* be more dialogic (e.g., Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2000). They do not necessarily deal with dialogue equally as well (Jackson, 1996; Kreisher, 1998; Stewart & Zediker, 2000) and some do not even use the term dialogue (for examples of explicit inclusion of dialogue, see also Deetz, 1992, 1995b; Senge, 1991).

Dialogue can be defined as a process of maintaining the tension between both self and other by maximizing rather than minimizing the tension between the two (Stewart & Zediker, 2000; Walters & Pearce, 2000). This tension is the foundation of joint action (Shotter, 1993). Cissna and Anderson's (1994) review of scholarship on dialogue described eight characteristics typically attributed to dialogue (pp. 13-15). Three of those characteristics are of great use in understanding the basic character of many contemporary trends in OD.

The first characteristic they list is "immediacy of presence." In that OD increasingly seeks to bring a broader range of human faculties to bear and, in part, to use them to make decisions affecting themselves and the company, OD practitioners are advocating a greater *presence* for individuals in their work lives. They advocate people speaking up, sharing responsibility, taking responsibility, integrating their values, exerting their values, breaking free of structures of domination, utilizing their unique and collective learning capacities, understanding and implementing "chaos" theories, personal development, and more. All of these can be understood as

requiring or leading to *more* presence and *less* routine and rehearsed behavior. An example is the emphasis on involvement in shared learning processes across functions and hierarchies that are central to learning organizations (Chawla & Renesch, 1995; Senge, 1991).

A second characteristic, “emergent unanticipated consequences,” is related to presence in that the greater presence of those involved in an activity leads to less scripted results. Fincham and Clark (2001) make the point that the relationship of an OD practitioner to a client is not formalized and doesn’t “amount to the passing on of advice or execution of solutions” (p. 10). Rather, they point out that there is a great deal of ambiguity that ties the OD practitioner and client together in a mutually dependent relationship because neither can fully determine, or pretend to fully determine, the outcome.

In addition, “collaboration” is central to many of the programs and an orientation toward collaboration is a third characteristic of dialogue mentioned by Cissna and Anderson. Collaboration is certainly inherent in the mutual dependence mentioned above. However, collaboration is being deliberately emphasized by some OD practices. Collaboration among the constituent clients or between the clients and a third party is a very common characteristic of OD goals. However, the relationship of the consultant to client is being more deliberately characterized as collaborative as well. Seminal volumes such as Argyris (1993), Senge (1991), Wheatley (1993), and Weisbord (1992) and commentaries on the professional relationship such as Schein (1996b, Schein et al., 2000) and Argyris (1997) describe a special awareness on the

part of the consultant of the co-constructedness of outcomes. Some of the various approaches advocated even make collaboration a central tenet. “Future Search Conferences” (Weisbord, 1992), for example, provide a structured environment for processing the input of many stakeholders (sometimes hundreds) into a coherent plan of action.

The common thread in much of the emerging body of OD literature and practice is that the consultant is actually being taken into consideration. Academics and practitioners, conferences and monographs are problematizing the role of the OD practitioner and focusing on the inherent vulnerability that comes about as a result of privileging collaboration and other characteristics of dialogue. Fincham and Clark (2001) sum it up by describing the relationship between consultant and client as “relatively intense and intimate” (p. 10).

Now, there is a trend in some areas of OD to move away from a medical model that positions the consultant as physician or expert (Schein et al., 2000). In fact, in the 1999 second edition of Block’s (1981) landmark OD consulting guide, he adds a chapter titled “Technique is Not Enough” to complement chapters such as (moving) “From Diagnosis to Discovery.” Dialogue is emerging as a central part of much of the practice of OD (Eisenberg et al., 1999; Kreisher, 1998). As dialogic themes have become more common in OD literature, so has a belief that not only should organizations take on these characteristics, but so should the practice of consulting itself (Anderson & Burney, 1997; Argyris, 1993; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 1998, 2000; Penman, 2000; and; Schon, 1987; Steier & Eisenberg, 1997).

This suggests that dialogic processes are valued, and also implies a fundamental paradox such that dialogic processes are needed to facilitate dialogic processes. If this is true, consultants and facilitators are an important part of the success or failure of these change processes.

These dialogic characteristics are present in this literature as well as in the practices that are the object of this study in varying degrees. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to describe dialogic processes as endemic to properly functioning organizations and to prescribe their incorporation or enhancement. The emerging trend in OD that embraces and problematizes these dialogic principles is the object of this study, and I will be referring to them as “dialogic organizational development” or simply as DOD. As suggested before, these programs show varying degrees of dialogic characteristics.

This optimistic mood sometimes brings OD consultants and management gurus right to the fringes of business practices. Talk of subjectivity, spirit, dialogue, and emotion abound and prompt Grieves (2000) to wonder, “can OD professionals operate on the moral high ground, preaching what often appears to be a new spiritual enlightenment influenced by a long Californian summer and a new-age agenda?” (p. 349). Whether this aesthetic is viable in corporate America is perhaps not as interesting as the question of whether modernist assumptions persist in this approach. Or is the emergence of dialogue’s and communication’s centrality to OD transforming OD professionals into postmodern subjects and OD practices into postmodern practices?

Critical Management Studies: A Pessimistic Mood

Moving beyond the published ideas on how to transform organizational cultures, the actual practices of DOD professionals and managers have consequences that are temporally connected. And as these programs have developed and matured over the past few decades, observers, both within and from outside of the DOD profession/business world, have begun to assess and refine the actual practices growing out of and informing this body of scholarship. When the focus is primarily on the processes described above, the mood is typically optimistic about the prospects not only for success of an organization that implements these principles but of the possibility of implementing the principles in the first place. Those who focus on the processes above are optimistic about the prospects of process implementation changing organizational cultures (Chawla & Renesch, 1995; Isaacs, 1993; Quinn, Wheatley, & Senge, 1994; Zohar, 1997). In fact, the potential for radical change is rarely questioned in this body of work.

In tension with this is a small but growing body of literature that is more critical of the prospects for successful implementation. These works typically focus on the structural circumstances in which change takes place (or does not). Critical perspectives on consulting usually conclude that OD does not proceed from a clear understanding of what it is about a culture they wish to change and do not sufficiently incorporate reflection and reflexivity so as to change organizational cultures significantly. Rather than arguing that one or the other focus is correct, my intent is

to see what questions and possibilities arise from keeping both in tension with each other.

Among the criticisms being made are that, in the effort to create organizational cultures that are inclusive, DOD practices fail to develop a broader range of people's capacities, and, worse, may perpetuate modernist ways of organizing (Case & Sylvester 1999; ten Bos, 1999; Thomas, 1999; Vaara & Kakkuri-Knuuttila, 1999, Zorn et al., 1999). This perspective assumes that the desired culture changes have a postmodern character while the less desirable current culture is more or less modern. Conceptualizing the desired cultures as dialogic equates with postmodernism (Stewart, 1994b) and vice versa.

At the core of this critique are learning organization concepts such as mental models and self-mastery (Senge, 1991). Ten Bos charges that:

The idea [mental models] is that just as the self is in charge of an inner space which can be thought of as a theatre full of pictures representing the outside world, so is the top manager in charge of whatever happens in her room. She controls her own actions and ideas. This assumption renders credibility to the suggestion that tinkering with mental models is enough to bring about changes in reality beyond play. (p. 17)

Ten Bos is arguing that intentionality (which is a dominant organizing principle of some DOD practice) is conceived, in this type of DOD, in a modernistic manner. Control is at the center (in the hands of the individual who has mastered his or her mental models), as are intentional change and singularity of worlds—the world that is represented in the manager's mental model. Mental models are replaceable, which may suggest multiplicity, but when you get right down to it one is always better and

should drive out the competing alternative(s). This could be the most fundamentally modernist assumption about the whole thing—the assumption that mental models represent reality (some better than others) and that individual agents can change mental models as is seen fit. There are reflexive elements to much of DOD, including Senge’s theory, but many elements do not include reflexivity, particularly when the practice, rather than the literature that informs it, is the focus of attention (ten Bos, 1999).

Alvesson and Willmott (1992) are concerned also about essentialism in DOD practices. A modernist assumption of the empowered individual agent is maintained when “it is assumed that beneath the alienated, fragmented surface of human consciousness there is an autonomous individual striving to come out” (p. 439). They also hint at a disingenuous quality to some of the DOD work focusing on emancipation:

According to the gurus of corporate culture, the goal is not simply to train or control people to work accurately and productively on the job which they are currently doing, but to regard their work as an opportunity for applying and developing their ability to innovate and to exercise their discretion. (p. 449)

The capacity to participate in the organization of organizations and the organization of society (even if in microcosm) is much broader than such capacities as innovation and the exercise of discretion that are “trained” for in much of what constitutes the profession of organizational development. But, as Alvesson and Willmott suggest, the “gurus of corporate culture” would like the feeling of that level of actualization without knowing how to achieve it or being able to go beyond training workers to do

their current jobs better, which is to say, more innovatively. DOD is becoming adept at facilitating organizational goals. However, when it comes to reflexively questioning goals at various operational levels, DOD still falls short.

Ten Bos (1999) and Zorn et al. (1999) argue that DOD has institutionalized change as a value in organizational cultures without critically accounting for the assumptions behind the value or the actual outcomes of potential change. Zorn et al. illustrate that change has been elevated to a value in and of itself by documenting a dramatic rise of interest in “‘change management’ and organizational development, along with the growth in the numbers of journals, books, and courses devoted to these topics” (1999, pp. 2-3). Change is something that all good managers cope with because, they are told, the world is constantly changing and if they are not constantly changing then they are going to be passed by. What is missing is critical assessment of whether change is actually happening as well as whether any proposed changes they might make are in alignment with the observed changes in the environment. Schein et al. (2000) observe that “a lot of culture change programs skip the business problem and the economic realities and go straight to advocating new cultures of teamwork, empowerment, openness, service, and the like” (p. 38). They skip the question of why these changes are needed. In many cases, already present competencies (both personal and structural) are eliminated or crippled because the system in which they reside is being replaced (Adler, 1999), or they have endemic problems that cannot be accounted for because the program *du jour* is beyond reproach (ten Bos, 1999; Vaara & Kakkuri-Knuuttila, 1999; Zorn et al., 1999).

Essentially, they argue that reflexivity is lacking when “the rush to change has become so fast, so heated, and so unthinking that we rarely have time to *reflect* on our work lives, let alone the deeper meanings of notions like progress, growth, and development” (Zorn et al., 1999, p. 4).

In addition to the criticism of throwing out the good with the bad is the presumption that changes must take place because whatever the culture is now, by definition, it is not good enough. This position is based on two assumptions. First, that the rigid vertical hierarchy of the paradigm case of a modern organization is dysfunctional and must be reorganized. The second assumption that this makes, related to the first, is that this paradigm case of modern organization does not work because it is inflexible. Information technology, globalization, and a diverse work force demand a flexible, responsive, nimble organization in order to remain relevant and competitive. These assumptions are sound and demand attention.

However, Zorn et al. equate the current fascination with change with the modernist fascination with progress. Inherent in the reasons for valuing change cited in the previous paragraph is a sense of alienation. In the face of expanding possibilities, modernist alienation takes on a postmodern flavor of dis-ease and restlessness (Lyotard, 1984). In a wholly modern/industrial/capitalist world, one may have been alienated from material, as well as social, means of production. Nonetheless, there was a singular (if not single) vision to strive for—progress. In contrast to this singular vision, “the contemporary notion of change is based on a far less clear idea about where society is, or should be, heading” (Zorn et al., 1999, p. 4).

This ambiguity extends to organizational life and, Zorn et al. argue, “progress” is translated into “development.” Thus, restless and dis-eased management gurus (Alvesson & Wilmot, 1992) dart around looking for converts to their vision, because if they can just change the culture they will have arrived where they need to be—organizational enlightenment.

Ambiguity can be seen as both an opportunity that may create richness and innovation and a limitation that may lead to misunderstanding and mistrust (Eisenberg, 1998). However, Zorn et al. (1999) argue that although the opportunities in the notion of growth and development are tremendous, there is a fundamental pitfall that the contemporary practice of DOD sometimes fails to avoid. Whereas “progress” is teleological and humanistic—it implies some sort of end result based on “human values” that have at least the appearance of being unambiguous and shared—“growth and development” is relative and ever evolving. When the response to our circumstances is framed as growth and development, there is no predetermined, always-already-present (Heidegger, 1962) end toward which to direct one’s efforts. Rather, we have to ask where we are now and where we are going. Growth and development requires reflexivity, the ongoing process of comparing ends and means and interpreting each in terms of the other. Zorn et al.’s critique is that change is being undertaken for the sake of change without reflection or reflexivity. The potential for creative tension in the ambiguity and multiplicities of social assessment is being undermined by valuing change itself, rather than change for something.

Some also assert that the practices of DOD can extend organizational control and command (Case & Sylvester 1999; Cox, 1999; Fincham, 1999; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Mintzberg, 1994; ten Bos, 1999; Thomas, 1999; Vaara & Kakkuri-Knuuttila, 1999) or even that DOD bolsters the *illusion* of control (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Visscher, 1999). Control is extended by DOD initiatives because of the expansion of human faculties accounted for. Not only is technical performance evaluated, so are many other aspects of one's existence in an "enlightened" organization. Also, DOD initiatives may become the subject of peer pressure.

Prichard (1999) and Case and Sylvester (1999) argue that the practice of DOD extends organizational control by commodifying learning. The first implication of this is the existence of "management fads" or, more nicely put, "management trends." Most change programs are proprietary and often even bear their own branding and trademark (such as Total Quality Management [TQM], Business Process Restructuring [BPR], Learning Organizations, Dia-logos, Future Search, Open Space Planning). Once a program has been created (and its materials copyrighted), the founders and developers offer training directly to individuals and companies or provide training, licensing, and certification to corporate and private trainers who will "apply" the program. Having learned some relevant program(s) makes for an enlightened employee. Thus, OD learnings can have currency that is unrelated to the actual learning itself. Decisions about change programs may be made on the basis of appearing to be "in on the ground floor" of something good, and thus many change programs are marketed with this in mind (Fincham & Clark, 2001). From a

supervisory point of view, it may be more important to appear to be doing something than to be doing something concretely tied to real problems or needs (Zorn et al., 1999). This eliminates the unexpected results of unreflective change for change's sake, but demonstrates respect for the shared value of "change."

The second implication of the commodification of learning is that DOD programs may become technologies to be passed intact from situation to situation regardless of individual realities, needs, and goals, and certainly without being shaped by those who will use them. Indeed, there is the potential that, because recognition and appreciation are essential, adaptation and flexibility are limited. A consultant who walks in and says "Let me help you out. I can't tell you what I will do, but it will be tailored to your situation" is less likely to be hired than one who walks in and makes a charismatic pitch about how his or her four-part program has worked for numerous other Fortune 500 companies.

In addition to programmatic change, DOD embraces a broad array of human capacities at a more general level of practice. Such qualities as "passion" (Hatcher, 1999), "emotion" (Cox, 1999), and "character" (Grugulis, 1999) become "instrumentalized" because they are colonized by organizational interests.

Organizational structures have always preferred some personal characteristics to others. Now the scope of those preferences is expanding. In the past, many of the personal characteristics pertained to rationality such as "logical," "analytic," and "decisive." DOD consultants, however, work to expand the range of these preferred personal characteristics beyond the domain of rationality. However, actively

advocating some values over others—especially by specifically *training* for certain values—is a colonization of the lives of employees. It cannot be assumed that the values of the organization—inherently tied to organizational objectives—are the same as those of the employees. Still, “organizational values” are typically disseminated from the top down.

Some of the DOD work described in the previous section is influenced by the work of clinical psychologists and family therapists. It can be argued, to greater and lesser degrees, that the practices advocated are good ways to live. However, generally when therapists practice therapy they do so on the initiative of the client. The current circumstance in DOD may be more like a therapist going to someone’s home and announcing that he or she needs therapy. So, where clinical psychology and psychotherapy are not likely to be perceived with distrust because they come at the initiative of the client, these same ideas and methods applied in an organizational setting may be construed as an unwelcome intrusion.

Certain DOD practices may conflate the interests of management with the interests of individuals. This increases control and may contribute to alienation because management interests are assumed to be everyone’s interests or the interests of individuals are “colonized” by being reframed as the “same” as those of management. For example, the uncritical acceptance of participatory design practices assumes that management interests are consistent and compatible with individual interests (Howcraft, 1999). At worst, it neither comes from an organic process nor reflects the individual’s values. Even when individuals share this value, it can still

alienate because it does not come from a process in which they were involved. Further, Thomas (1999) argues that treating employees as stakeholders (a mainstay of DOD as well as organizational theory), while creating more inclusive processes, crudely glosses differences between managerial interests and those of individuals such that fundamental inequalities are left unchanged. Neither Howcraft nor Thomas dismiss the practices. Rather, they argue that these need to be the subject of critical reflection if they are not to perpetuate the structures and relationships they are intended to transform.

Ten Bos (1999) says additional inequities are created or reified when certain workers are included in DOD efforts while others are not. This echoes Ehrensall's (1999) belief that DOD functions as an elite discourse, thereby constraining what she calls "local strategic actors." DOD also is criticized for failing to create real change in that frequently the processes of learning are limited to a privileged few in a way that reflects the existing hierarchy (ten Bos, 1999). According to ten Bos, even if the transformational efforts of DOD are successful, when they are applied in a way that is prejudicial to the existing hierarchy, access to them perpetuates any inequalities and inefficiencies that are endemic to that hierarchical structure. Especially when the internal and external rhetoric of a company favors something such as "learning organizations," those who were treated to a two or three day seminar with Senge are privileged linguistically and strategically.

King (1999) concludes that emphasizing performance, outcomes, or results, as many DOD programs do, obscures the nature of the processes that are sold as

“leading to performance.” This provides the conditions where control and command can be extended without being, literally, “accounted” for. The means are glossed or ignored by the attention paid to results. Focusing on outcomes ignores the ties between process and outcome because processes are justified, to a certain extent, by their outcomes—even if they lead to further control or dominance. Inherently, this inhibits reflexivity and the ability to distinguish among short, medium, and long term outcomes. The result is an inability to see equifinality or multiple effects. You are either on the bus or off the bus. But if you comment on the path of the bus or recommend taking a different bus, you will be regarded as not being a team player. Schein et al. (2000) add that the overall cultures of organizations are not changed by DOD practices:

Peter Senge's work on the learning organization is brilliant in turning on people, and even small groups, but then it often fails to influence the larger organization. The organizational culture immune system prevents innovative ways of working from spreading, and we realize in retrospect that we should have been considering the larger culture in the first place. But we don't yet know how to systemically intervene in the larger culture. (p. 35)

Social control may replace collaborative spirit when collaborative initiatives are introduced into traditional hierarchies.

The claims of paradoxes and failures in DOD that I have been discussing may be partially attributable to organizations' multiple subcultures of operations, engineering, and design (Schein 1996a, 1996b; Schein et al., 2000). Although the subcultures may share overall cultural qualities and structural relations, each subculture expresses these qualities differently. Add to these the financial success

logic of executives and the humanistic logic of DOD, and we are talking about at least five different moral logics (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997) at work. Schein et al. (2000) believe that the problem is that “organizational development tends to badmouth the [other subcultures] instead of trying to understand them” (p. 37). Thus, the interplay of the different subcultures, their moral logics, and specific language games may be downplayed and dismissed by DOD professionals.

Common to all of these criticisms is a concern that the espoused changes are localized and not systemic. To explain the mechanisms that limit these changes, Case and Sylvester (1999), Schein (1996b), and Schon (1987) charge that modernism, and its concomitant linear distaste for reflexivity, is learned through the institutional structures of management education—it is part of both management culture as well as the overall culture. It is learned not just in the curriculum but also in the way the curriculum, institutions, and classes are organized. Although there is much chest beating about new paradigms and cultures, these “new” ideas are introduced in an institutional culture that drives a pedagogy that almost dooms change to failure. For example, DOD, especially when administered through a human resources department, may extend the rationalization and reductionistic processes of traditional management concerns such as compensation and absenteeism to the broader range of human capacities it now seeks to engage. While professing an alternative, the culture, the organization, the department, and the individual implementers continue to operate largely within a modern social structure. Even truly “enlightened” DOD professionals, when they dismiss modern social structures as “the problem,” fail to

acknowledge the demand for reflexivity made by the web of modern relationships in which all relevant parties are enmeshed, including themselves.

Argyris (1993, 1995) attributes this sort of phenomenon to the difference between “theories in use” and “espoused theories.” Engaging a broader range of human capacities is the theory espoused by DOD and much of contemporary management culture. The theory in use, however, does not necessarily do this. Reflexivity is the connection between theories in use and espoused theories, whereby they become more closely aligned by one or both changing (perfect alignment is temporally impossible). Going back to the bus metaphor, the bus driver has developed some sort of inclusive, collaborative process to decide where the bus is going. The bus driver won’t drive down dirt roads or into bad neighborhoods and has to be home by 5:00 p.m. The passengers decide to go to the ballpark in a genuinely collaborative and inclusive process and feel really good about it. While waiting at a stoplight, a few passengers strike up a conversation about whether they should proceed ahead through a construction zone or take a detour around it. The driver interrupts to point out that they only get to pick the destination, not the route. A few minutes later a few different passengers begin to contemplate whether they chose the best destination because there is a big sale at a major department store on the other side of town, and the ball team is playing one of the worst opponents in the league. Someone sitting behind them snaps that they had their chance and that they should shut up and be accountable for their decision. Murmuring breaks out and by the time the next stoplight is reached the two are told to get out if they won’t shut up and be

team players. The bus arrives at the ballpark without traversing any dirt roads or bad neighborhoods and the driver is home by 5:00. On the face of it, there has been change. Instead of the riders facing a set schedule, they are included in a genuinely collaborative process that in and of itself may involve a great deal of reflection on past experiences riding buses and one's current needs and desires. However, reflexivity is limited to one moment at the beginning of the process, and outside that moment the culture still inhibits reflexivity because the bus driver expects deference to certain decisions once made because she or he is, after all, in charge. In addition, most of the riders don't want reflection on the destination of the bus in the middle of the process because they are still happy with its destination and resent these fickle people who are changing their mind. The culture is still, after all, modern.

Conclusion

DOD can be seen as a wonderful opportunity to transform, at the very least, people's experiences of work. It does this by facilitating communal orientations, participative processes, and dialogues that expand the range of human faculties engaged by people's work. In this respect, DOD may be seen as a driving force in the transition into postmodernism, or, at least, be seen as a postmodern voice. Recalling the title of the first chapter, DOD can be seen as an agent "working on postmodernism." And working on postmodernism, in this perspective, is working (negatively) on alienation.

On the other hand, DOD can be seen as a further colonization of workers' lives. As DOD extends the interests of the organization beyond workers' behavior

and into their cognitive, emotional, and spiritual lives, it further colonizes and commodifies the life of the worker. In the previous chapter, I established that the ways of relating, sense-making, and organizing endemic to modernism are inherently alienating. To the extent that DOD's intrusions extend modernism, they will, ultimately, extend alienation. One example of this that is becoming apparent is growing skepticism toward "change programs." Employees can become alienated from the well-intentioned process that promises (or at least hopes) to deliver them from alienation. In addition, Zorn et al. (2000) argue that transcendence of modernism is a necessary, although unlikely sufficient, condition for transcendence of alienation (Zorn et al., 1999).

From this perspective, the issue seems to be more a problem of pedagogy rather than one of theory. Many of these programs may transcend modernistic dualisms and predict-and-control thinking to various degrees in their conception. However, when these programs are implemented in a system that is in a co-productive relationship with modernist ways of relating, they might be transformed, not by a failure of philosophy, but by an already-present-way-of-relating, into the image of modernism. In fact, they may worsen the condition, for they wear the guise of other and alternative; they appear to be the way out, but could, instead, be a way further into the miasma of alienation.

The critics look at the structures involved in doing OD work in general as well DOD in general. When they do so they see the features of alienation and disenfranchisement of modernism being perpetuated. The optimists look at human

interaction in DOD work. They see moments and trends of difference that make them hopeful that alienation and disenfranchisement can be mitigated by new ways of being that can be called postmodern.

Because of the potential that critics and consultants have described for missteps in the effort to implement dialogic alternatives for transforming organizations, it is critically important to understand how these DOD consultants deal with the issues of modern and postmodern identities in their lives and in their work. The consultants are critical nodes in an effort to postmodernize life. This is an effort that is pervasive (although certainly not dominant) not only in business, but in western, and especially, American, culture at large.

Before contemplating the work that the consultants do, there is one further thread of OD literature to examine. It is not aligned with either the optimistic or pessimistic voices reviewed in this chapter. Rather, it takes up the issue at the center of both arguments: subjectivity. It is a small but growing body of literature that examines the intimate details of identity that OD consultants not only may, but also must, face in the course of doing their jobs.

CHAPTER 3

SUBJECTIVITY AND DIALOGIC ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

As I discussed in Chapter 1, alienation describes a rift between one's self and the production of one's self. Alienation is a feeling that one has not participated properly or substantially in the production of one's own self and does not own the resources of one's self. Alienation is a feeling that one has no place in one's community (or doesn't have a community at all). Alienation is manifest through frustration, melancholy, and detachment. Postmodern subjectivities are a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for transcending the alienation of modernism.

Subjectivity is central to dialogic organizational development (DOD) practice. An interest in dialogue presumes an interest in subjectivity, relationships, and community. Necessarily, DOD practitioners must attend to their own subjectivity, the subjectivity of others, and the processes that continually constitute subjectivity. To the extent that this occurs, one would presume there to be a rich literature, as well as institutions supporting and encouraging reflection and attention to subjectivity.

Instead, we find that OD has a small, but growing, literature that addresses the issue of subjectivity explicitly. A significant portion of this OD literature that focuses explicitly on subjectivity is primarily guided by a desire to theorize subjectivity (Argyris 1996; Schein et al., 2000). However, there is a smaller, but significant,

portion that amounts to what Hyde (1995) calls “ontological inquiry.” Ontological inquiry is reflection on the relationships between subjects, which relationships are constructed by communicating. Thus, like much of the DOD work on which I have focused in the previous chapter, ontological inquiry is inherently dialogic. In this chapter, I review this portion of the DOD literature that functions as ontological inquiry.

DOD Consulting as Ontological Inquiry

There is a handful of studies that have actually looked at reflection and subjectivity as central issues for DOD. These include DOD consultants taking a reflexive look at their own careers (Schor, Kane, & Lindsay, 1995), a full length psychological manuscript that focuses on the psychological processes of DOD work (Stapley, 1996), an account of an “eye-opening” consulting experience that emphasized the centrality of subjectivity (Beeby, Broussin, Grisoni, James, & Shutte, 1999), and a study of dialogic processes in a DOD consultancy (West, 2001).

Schor et al. (1995) observe that their work as OD consultants has led to a heightened sense of self as well as placed specific demands on their identities: “We have found that who we are shapes our interactions with our clients. The work of being a consultant happens long before we arrive on site. Every consultant must be a participant observer in her own process as well as a participant observer in the organization” (p. 43). This confession about their preoccupation with their own selves is the culmination of a series of introspective conversations among three OD

practitioners who were going through major professional and personal life upheavals simultaneously. One was going through a divorce, one was recovering from cancer, and one had lost her job. They discovered serendipitously that these life-changing events in their respective lives led them to reevaluate and reconsider their careers and how they were doing OD work.

When these three reflected on their practice, they determined that they had to be conscious about participating in the production of their own identities because “authentic expression of the self provides for authentic expression of the other” (p. 56). Although “authentic expression of the self” is ambiguous enough to make a definition superfluous, what is not ambiguous is that the self, especially the self in relation to others, is considered to be of vital importance, not only to the consultants, but also to their practice of consultancy. Further, they decided that enabling authentic expression of others was the central goal of their work, regardless of the specific project. They see awareness of this central issue as important to doing DOD work effectively. Ontological inquiry may be a core process of DOD consulting.

Stapley (1996), a psychologist, provides a more clinical perspective on subjectivity in DOD consulting. He concludes that one primary function of OD consultants is to be the object of emotional transference by their clients. Thus, consultants may serve the purpose of personal growth and transformation of some sort—like a traditional therapeutic relationship. Emotional transference serves the “authentic expression” of clients by acting as an outlet for a variety of expressions

that can be blocked by an ambiguous relationship to one's self. An ambiguous relationship to one's self is characteristic of modernism, as reviewed in Chapter 1. An ambiguous relationship to one's self is a form of alienation. In addition, Stapley says, being the object of transference may confuse the consultants' relationship to their own selves, if it is not clear to begin with. Thus, emotional transference, as described by Stapley (1996), puts demands on DOD practitioners to be clear about their own subjectivity in relation to their clients, much as Schor et al. (1995) describe.

Beeby et al. (1999) report an experience that led directly to their appreciation of the importance of subjectivity for the practice of DOD and for DOD practitioners. They were hired by a major public service organization in the U.K. to help the managers understand the impact of reorganization on the staff. The staff they spoke to told a consistent story of mixed messages, disregard for the staff by management, and general mismanagement. As the five consultants reflected together on their data collection, they found themselves demonizing the management and identifying with the staff. When they reported their findings to the management, the managers were defensive and hostile to them, despite the consultants' best efforts to present their findings neutrally. Beeby et al.'s story illustrates Stapley's emotional projection, especially that it was coming from both "sides" of a dispute. Not only did the staff project their anger with management at the consultants, but the consultants inexorably projected that anger to management, despite their efforts not to do so.

Although Stapley recognizes that “it is not pleasant to be on the end of negative transference” (p. 194), Beeby et al. managed to “survive” their experience. One factor they largely attribute this to is the consulting team’s habit of taking time together for dialogue about the process:

We consciously set out to understand and work with the assumptions that lay behind our communications with each other within the consultancy team. This is what we take dialogue to mean. It was through this process that we came to understand our problems and issues with regard to leadership within the team, our dependencies and interdependencies with each other, our differing historical relationships with the client organisation, the symmetrical power relations between us, and what each of these in turn meant for the ways we were collectively and individually engaged with the client organisation. (p. 68)

In addition, they involved an additional consultant (who was not otherwise part of the project) as a facilitator in their dialogues about identity in order to “derive a greater understanding about the nature and meanings of our interventions and their impact on both the client organization and ourselves” (p. 68). These consultants found ontological inquiry so helpful in dealing with a difficult project that they brought in an outside consultant to help them facilitate their process.

West (2001) studied a small OD consulting company as a dialogic workplace. In a series of in-depth interviews, she asked each employee to identify what was going on when “communication was at its best.” She summarizes their responses:

Having some degree of openness to and value for communication of this nature; being willing to take risks in communication; and being engaged, to some degree, in the continual process of self awareness were seen by the majority of interviewees to be individual characteristics that influence the emergence of these moments. Maintaining a balance between self and other . . . communicating openly and honestly about the thoughts and feelings most

relevant to the moment; and checking for accuracy in order to better understand the other and minimize false assumptions were all identified as being the attributes of relationships that contributed to communication at it's best. Finally, contributing organizational characteristics included congruent modeling on the part of those in leadership roles, time for metacommunication built into the structure of the work process, and a performance review process that rewarded relational competencies as well as competencies within each job function. (p. 22)

The list that they produced, West argued, could be regarded as a list of characteristics of dialogue.

This list included explicit issues of subjectivity such as an open and honest environment that encouraged authentic expressions of one's self, an equal value for self and other, as well as a willingness to be profoundly changed. These abstractions of subjectivity, she argues, are bound together by the individuals being

conscious of one's own thoughts and emotional responses as they arose and [being] able to identify potential drivers of these. Perfection in this area was not described as being the goal, but rather it was the conscious engagement in this process that was emphasized as being valuable. (West, 2001, pp. 11-12)

She describes dialogue and self-awareness as a core process for DOD consultants.

These consultants have built a workplace that reflects the values of their work. In fact, they have even written many of these characteristics of dialogue into their performance appraisal process in the form of "relational competencies."

Along similar lines, Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen (2000), both academics and OD consultants, developed what they term a "caring container" as a model for doing performance feedback. The caring container includes self-awareness in the form of learning from defensive behavior. Defensive behavior is a defense against perceived threats to one's self. To that end they facilitate supervisors learning to

conduct conversations in which these defensive behaviors (by both the supervisor and the employee) can be noticed. The goal of this awareness, for Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen, is learning.

A Community of Practice

Not only have the reflexive demands of dialogue in OD been noted, as described above, but it has also been connected to the way in which OD practitioners organize when they network with each other—metaOD, if you will. Grubb (2000) studied a group of OD professionals as a “community of practice.”² He defines communities of practice as

Groups of people who informally come together to share experience and knowledge in pursuit of a common interest or enterprise. They engage in free flowing, creative activities and dialogue, including inquiry and experiment, to discover new approaches. (p. 1)

He goes on later to say that a community of practice “provide[s] a forum for reflection-in-action” (p. 2). Grubb is essentially examining the degree to which these OD professionals do as they advocate. Even those practitioners who do not actively advocate or study the concept of communities of practice advocate other dialogic practices and concepts (Kreisher, 2000) of which “communities of practice” is one.

First, Grubb notes that the group he studied has a revolving membership that is never the same at each meeting. No dues are paid and there are no negative consequences to missing one, or several, meetings. It is as much a virtual group as a corporeal one. The actual existence of the group involves a shared spirit, attitude, and

values rather than a specific population of people. The exact nature of that spirit was the focus of Grubb's study, and constitutive of a community of practice.³

Grubb (2000) asked members of the group to rank a series of items according to the importance of each item to their participation in the group. It might be expected that the items most instrumental in nature would be ranked higher, and that the more dialogic items would be ranked lower. Presumably, consultants would want some tangible personal gain for their time. But this traditional understanding of exactly what would constitute personal gain or constitute an "organizational" goal was insufficiently complex for these DOD practitioners. Among the items ranked highest, second and third respectively, were "Networking for like minds or camaraderie" and "Sense of professional support and connection," which appear to be more affiliative motives for attendance. Likewise, among the items ranked lowest, eighth and tenth (out of ten), were "Solutions to work problems" and "Networking for business prospects," both of which appear to be more instrumental motives associated with personal benefits.

Grubb sees the two highly ranked items mentioned above as being at the heart of this community of practice. The "like minds" and "camaraderie" that are sought, he says, are minds and comrades interested in reflection and learning. The experimental nature, the dialogue, the free flowing inquiry, are the shared values for which these DOD practitioners come together. Whereas communities of practice

² The group of OD consultants Grubb used in this study happens to be the same group from which the participants in my study were selected. See Chapter 4 for more details about this group.

themselves may exist around a variety of catalysts, the catalyst of this community of practice is communities of practice. Thus, reflection, self-examination, experimentation, and dialogue in some way contribute to the vitality of these DOD practitioners.

Grubb's participants are professional consultants, many of whom are independent and reliant on finding and doing work for a living. Under such circumstances, we might expect the sort of instrumental "give it to me straight and in bullet points" professionals in power ties and sensible shoes that we see in the media. Even much academic and quasi-academic writing of the past decade has focused on the demands for speed and direct applicability in a communications technology-centric business environment (Kreisher, 1998; Zorn et al., 2000). Why, then, do we see dialogue and reflection figuring prominently in this "community of practice"?

The participants seem to have built a dialogic forum and behave accordingly in order to sustain it. Or else they behave dialogically and consequently a dialogic forum exists. Either answer presumes that participants are aware of a desire in themselves to change people's experience of work from instrumental to dialogic. Either answer also assumes that this motive is at least somewhat shared. It also presumes that they are aware that they may or may not reproduce the desired relationships based at least in part on how they relate to one another. Therefore, one answer could be that they understand that it would be inconsistent to strive for dialogic, communal relationships in an instrumental, associative forum and thus they

³ The embodiment of this spirit by individual consultants is the primary concern of mine.

have worked at least somewhat consciously toward constructing a dialogic, communal forum. Doing so requires an understanding of, and ability to talk about, their own subjectivities.

Conclusion

Clearly, this literature suggests that identity may be an important issue to OD practitioners. It also suggests that the preoccupation extends beyond a curiosity. DOD work requires a dialogic disposition in order to do the work. This dialogic disposition is oriented toward ontological inquiry into one's subjectivity and identity.

Letiche and van Hattem (2000) have argued that the contemporary conditions of work create a confrontational relationship between self and work. They note that, "The self/organization relationship is fraught with psychic dangers and powerful pitfalls to identity" (p. 363). This antagonism is due to demands of the organization such as rationality and separation of personal and work lives (reviewed in Chapter 1). To the extent that DOD consultants wish to undo the alienation inherent in this sort of relationship, they must be well versed in and attend carefully to these issues of subjectivity not only in their clients, but in themselves.

DOD consultants face an even greater challenge because their work is actually *about* identity, especially development of identity in relation to the organization. Examples of this identity antagonism include, but are not limited to, the sort of "soul searching" encountered by Schor et al. (1995), the projection identified by Stapley et al. (1996), and the personal involvement encountered by Beeby et al. (1999).

Many voices assess the potential for OD to mitigate alienation. In Chapter 2, I categorized them as optimistic and pessimistic. The identity issues covered in this chapter add a further layer of voices to the conversation. It is essential to resist the urge to choose among these voices—to create a hierarchy of rationality. However, traditional research methods often do just this—regardless of whether they are quantitative or qualitative. In the next chapter, I describe a methodology for dealing with these multiple voices when privileging one is undesirable.

CHAPTER 4
SYSTEMS-DIALOGIC METHODOLOGY:
STRUCTURAL COUPLING AND FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVES
IN ACTION

The rules of behavior that I go by are more guided by what kind of intervention I am making than the question of will I get valid data or will this reveal the right kind of information? Those are secondary priorities. Primary considerations are what will be the impact of how I answer the telephone, and how I deal with the client's questions or how I relate moment to moment to the situation. That too comes out of cultural learning. Entering a new culture, you have got to think about how you are acting even as you are trying to gather data about what is going on here. (Schein et al., 2000, p. 32)

Systems theory and dialogue do not immediately seem applicable to each other or to methodology. However, not only do they have a strong affinity for each other, but they are very useful for framing and informing methodology. In this chapter, I first discuss a type of systems theory called structural coupling (Luhmann, 1991) and an approach to research called "first person." I then explain the implications of structural coupling for a dialogic methodology. Finally, I describe my methods and research setting.

Systems Theory

Researchers must, as Hyde (1995) urges, reflect on the relationship between themselves and their world. This relationship is not characterized by a certain scientific relationship between observeds and observations. Nor is the relationship

arbitrary. Neither positivism nor relativism will answer the question of the researcher's relationship to the world.

When researchers assume that their observations correspond to a piece of reality, they are likely to make one of two mistakes. They either assume that they are separate from the world of their observations (or, at least, can become separate), and therefore cannot effect it, or they assume that their world is a collection of interpenetrating texts (Jackson, 1989). Believing that our world consists of objects that are independent of our descriptions and uses of them, and the meaning we make of them as well as these acts is the positivist fallacy. The interpenetrating texts notion has been extensively developed to the extent that researchers may take themselves to be an intersection of texts (for example McGee, 1984). But, ultimately, this leads down the same path as the prior example. Researchers become irrelevant as individuals when they are a "white-heterosexual-male-Midwesterner. . . ." In short, researchers become "just" another text to be read. But as Jackson points out, "Quite simply, people cannot be reduced to texts any more than they can be reduced to objects" (1989, p. 184).

So, as Bateson (1979), Maturana and Varela (1987), and Luhmann (1991) argue, along with Hyde (1995) and Gadamer (1975), there is a more complex relationship between observeds and observers that is mitigated by language. Luhmann (1991) clarifies this relationship between observeds and observers, calling it "structural coupling." He names the primary subconcepts "minds" and "worlds." Minds are boundaried systems that are closed organizationally. This does not mean

that the organization of the system doesn't change. It does mean, however, that this organization is always unique among other systems and therefore "impenetrable," meaning that no meaning can flow intact between minds. The most obvious example of a mind is also the most immediately interesting to a communication researcher: the individual human being. However, all social units are minds as well, from a family to the world, including the American higher education system, the Tennessee higher education system, the University of Tennessee, that university's communication department, and a particular professor taken collectively with her advisees.

"Worlds" are the minds (collectively) that are salient to the existence of the mind in question. From the perspective of this particular mind, these other salient minds are the "world" to which all of this mind's responses are directed (addressable). Thus, a mind's world is highly fluid, changing almost moment to moment sometimes, and expansive, encompassing many more minds than just those that may seem to be present.

On the face of it, it seems that our only challenge as researchers in conquering the relationship between observeds and observers is to create a map of minds and worlds. Indeed, much of the history of systems theory involves representational attempts of this sort. However, Steier (1991) points out that "the research process itself must be seen as socially constructing a world or worlds, with the researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research" (pp. 1-2). The vein of systems theory (or cybernetics, as it is alternately called) that includes reflexivity is commonly called "second cybernetics" or "second order cybernetics" (Hoffman,

1981; Keeney, 1983, Steier, 1991). A common distinction is thus to refer to “observing” systems rather than “observed” systems. Steier (1991) also observes that reflexivity, in addition to being a circumstance of doing research, is a useful way to understand what others are doing. Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, and Penn (1987) demonstrate this in a therapeutic setting by not only including the therapist in the concept of “family system” but by doing away with diagnoses and interventions and simply trying to foster and facilitate reflexive actions on the part of everyone involved. In a similar manner, reflexivity can be inserted into research.

Minds and worlds are simultaneously separate and interdependent, coupled structurally. Each may be affected by occurrences in the other, but the effects will be incorporated in terms of the structure of the respective system (mind). Thus, meaning cannot cross the “membrane” of social existence intact, without being transformed by the organization of the “receiving” system. Likewise, this “meaning” will inevitably effect the organization of the “receiving” system. Maturana and Varela (1987) call this sort of effect a perturbation that occurs in response to the perception of a difference. Because minds are organizationally closed, difference is the product of interaction between mind and world, hence neither its form nor content can be predicted.

That these effects are unpredictable does not, however, mean that they are arbitrary. Minds “grow up” attending to a world and therefore develop certain

conventions of pattern⁴ for understanding that world. This pattern is the “organization” of a mind referred to above. Bateson (1979) argues that it is not “difference” that matters so much as it is patterns of difference that make a difference. Perceiving difference depends on the perceiver’s conventions of pattern. Further, minds are situated in a world and cannot help but feed back into it as well. Therefore, the relationship between minds and worlds is not arbitrary, but patterned.

This patterning itself is affected by interactions with a world. Therefore, there is a reflexive relationship between worlds and minds. Minds and worlds are organizationally closed but structurally open or “structurally coupled” (Luhmann, 1991). In communication theory, Shotter (1984) calls this principle the “doubly structured” nature of communication. One structure is what an utterance “means” in context; the other structure is the way it provides a way for the participants to “go on” with the conversation. The second structure provides the way communicating always comes from a past and provides a future.

It is tempting at this point to joyfully decree that all we have to do is uncover the “conventions of pattern” of others to predict and control “patterns of difference that make a difference,” and we will be on our way to a true human science. But we have to put this all in motion before we can declare such a pursuit. Imagine a researcher observing a team in an organization. Because minds are structurally open, each member of the organization is structurally coupled with other individuals, as

⁴ Bateson (1984) calls these conventions of pattern making “patterns of difference that make a difference.” I call them “conventions” to focus on their learned and individual qualities.

well as with families, schools, civic and religious groups, etc. Now, each of those groupings—family, church, etc.—is itself a mind, organizationally closed, but structurally open to exchange with other minds (at all levels of each organization—individual, group, society, community, etc.). Going back to the organization, we must recognize that the organization itself constitutes a mind, as certainly do many semi-autonomous units (from dyads to divisions) within the organization. Each of these minds is structurally open to exchange with other minds (at all levels of organization). Last, but certainly not least, the researcher is a mind, as well as a part of other minds, including an intellectual tradition served by a professional community (or, more likely, several), all of which are structurally open to exchange with other minds (at all levels of organization). And I am only scratching the surface. I am not just arguing that the portfolio of relationships is too complex to account for. I am also arguing that, as researchers, we are inexorably intertwined with that which we observe *and* in a constant exchange with it that we cannot bracket. That is, we are structurally coupled with the “world” we “observe.” This theory has significant implications for methodological choices.

Methodological Choices

Hyde (1995) asserts that ontological inquiry challenges basic assumptions about one’s self. He is primarily concerned with reconceptualizing “the relationship of inquiry to the inquirer” (p. 6). Gadamer (1988) observes that this is primarily a question of the relationship of scholarly inquiry to language. Third-person researchers engage in an effort to master language by, for example, limiting the

language that can be said to apply (variables) and creating a special language to which the subject language is subservient (significance, validity, sampling). One way of doing this is to engage the ways in which language is functioning by, for example, accounting for decisions by the researcher (inner monologue) or engaging subjects in ways that are less restricted (dialogue). Gadamer concludes that the central task of research should be, “the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language” and not “the correct mastery of language” (p. 346).

Making a methodological choice is choosing between attempting to master a language and trying to understand that which takes place in language. These are not choices that uncover or discover what is already present. They create an account of something. This is just as true of an experimental design as it is of other methods. The main methodological choice is between first-person and third-person approaches (Pearce & Cronen, 1989). A third-person approach presents material as found and references a set of criteria that are not attributable to the researcher, the subject, or the interaction, direct or by proxy, between the two. A first-person approach presents material as created in the interplay of researcher and subject (as well as the “worlds” in which they live) and references a set of criteria directly attributable to the researcher, the subjects, and the interaction among the two.

Making a methodological choice is choosing how to approach “subjects” and how to frame a phenomenon. Approaching subjects with the intent of fostering reflexivity, rather than uncovering truth and framing a phenomenon as an opening, rather than a closing, are characteristics of first-person approaches. There are

essentially two dimensions to making methodological choices: epistemological and axiological. Epistemological choices have implications for credibility, validity, and perhaps reliability. Axiological or moral choices have implications for behavior and conduct of the researcher and the qualities of outcomes within and beyond the research project.

Epistemological Choices

The purpose of third-person research is to establish generalizations. Generalizations never refer to specific occurrences of a phenomenon. Rather, they attempt to be accurate as generalizations about a class of occurrences that share a common phenomenon. To the extent that the researcher can rule out that something other than the phenomenon itself produced the results and that the results were accurately measured, the study is said to have validity.

Claims produced in third-person research are directly applicable only to classes of objects. A classic claim of this sort is that men tend to be more instrumental and women more affiliative in their communication styles. The validity, as well as reliability, of this claim is well established and accepted. However, it only produces claims about classes of things: men and women. Classical logic supposes that one can move from classes of objects to specific examples (or occurrences) of a member of that class by reasoning deductively. Thus, if men tend to be more instrumental and women more affiliative, then this man will be more instrumental (and this woman will be more affiliative).

This deductive leap, however, is inadequate for the wielder of this knowledge. First, even the finest generalizations in the social sciences are accurate only a majority of the time. This means that sometimes the deductions will be flat out wrong. Sometimes, in response to criticisms that third-person knowledge ignores context, further variables (generalizations about them) are added to the third-person knowledge to increase the accuracy of the claims. A woman who is affiliative with her best friend from high school may be instrumental with her mechanic. Further, she may be instrumental with her mechanic when negotiating the price of repairs and affiliative when she and the mechanic are waiting for the technician to come back from test-driving her car and instrumental with her best friend from high school when trying to divide up the check for lunch. Theoretically, as we accumulate pieces of third-person knowledge (about gendered communication styles in context) we can make more and more accurate predictions about specific examples (or occurrences) of a member of a class.

However, we are greatly limited by complexity in this case. Let's say we make our gendered communication styles into a matrix with the other axis represented by "affiliative contexts" and "instrumental contexts" and we give dimensions to these two different kinds of contexts such as (a) amount of time available, (b) importance of relationship, and (c) mood of interactants. Now, if I can assess only these three dimensions, classify the context accordingly as "affiliative" or "instrumental," and cross-reference that with the gender of the interactants, then I can make more accurate (although still far from perfectly accurate) predictions about the

communicative style of the interactants. Already I have clearly moved beyond the scope of analytic processes a human being can perform in the microseconds typically allotted for response in everyday ordinary social interaction. And this model I have proposed is still *quite* simple.

Second, this claim offers no guidance as to what to do with the induction (assuming it is accurate) once it is made. Socrates is a man. Therefore Socrates is instrumental in communicative style. Does that mean I should be instrumental (symmetrical) with him? Should I be affiliative (complementary) with him? Does it matter if I am a man or a woman? What does it mean if he is not instrumental with me? Does it say something about me? Or him? What does it say? The knowledge itself is not in a usable form.

Unfortunately, perhaps, “men” and “women” are never actually encountered in life, and spurious variables cannot typically be controlled for. Instead, we encounter a man or a woman ensconced in a context and a web of relationships, as are we ourselves. Claims produced by first-person research are about individual examples (or occurrences) of things rather than classes. Coherence is the standard (of validity) for first-person claims.

Ontological Choices

Third-person approaches insists on epistemological grounds for assessing validity. Epistemological grounding of validity establishes certain forms of discourses as privileged (Rorty, 1989). Bochner (1985) explains that “by equating knowledge with representation, the received view makes truth dependent on method”

(p. 28). The exact form varies, but in the rhetorical tradition it has been argument (Fisher 1987) and in science it has been the language of scientific method, which is identifiable with third-person approaches, as I have been describing them. However, Fisher (1987) asserts that “no matter how strictly a case is argued—scientifically, philosophically, or legally—it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world that is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality” (p. 49).

However, Fisher (1987), Rorty (1989), and Stewart (1994a) propose that a story has an internal logic that should be the basis for judging validity of narratives. Lyotard (1984) argues that scientific studies have always depended upon narrative arrangement to establish validity and that the validity of those narratives depends on their adherence to a pre-existing standard for such narratives. The question of whether the proper method was followed becomes the question of what would be “good reasons” for coming to a particular conclusion. Thus, the criterion of validity becomes internal coherence, rather than adherence to a predetermined method. This, Rorty (1989) argues, is a question of ontology, rather than epistemology. The criterion of coherence is directly applicable to validity in first-person accounts.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (1991) defines coherence as “**a**: systematic or logical connection or consistency **b**: integration of diverse elements, relationships, or values” and defines coherent as “logically or aesthetically ordered or integrated; consistent **b**: having clarity or intelligibility; understandable.” Thus, first-person research can be understood as aspiring to provide systematic, logically or

aesthetically ordered connections between diverse human social experiences that are clear and intelligible in a way that is useful and practical.

Fisher (1987) emphasizes the importance of what he calls “characterological coherence.” He argues that characters contribute to the believability of a narrative by behaving in morally and logically consistent ways. If a character’s actions “contradict one another, change significantly, or alter in “strange” ways, the result is a questioning of character” (p. 47). Thus, the voices of individual “characters” are crucial to the establishment of “clear” and “intelligible” in the definition above. Therefore, a first-person approach must present individual voices.

First-person claims offer both lesser and greater complexity than third-person claims. Third-person research attempts to control the context and the subject, allowing “in” only those elements that are desired. First-person research attempts to control much less of the context and subject so as to allow “in” any elements that may pertain to this subject in this context. Of course, there is no perfectly controlled or uncontrolled setting. In fact, naming the “subject” and the “context” is an exercise of control. In this sense, first-person research tries to err on the side of inclusivity, meanwhile realizing that complete inclusivity is neither possible nor desirable. It therefore includes a good deal more complexity than third-person claims. A third-person account of gendered communication styles contains little or no information about any specific event of a person communicating in a style relevant to his or her gender. A first-person account, by definition, could only be of a specific encounter

(or encounters) with gendered communicating. Third-person claims are often held up to the standard of parsimony. First-person claims are never parsimonious.

First-person claims also offer less complexity than third-person claims in terms of the number of abstractions that have to be made by anyone wishing to “use” the knowledge first hand. Third-person research typically moves from induction to deduction. This requires a user to be inductive in applying the knowledge to a specific event. Induction is rarely intuitive and requires substantial resources of abstraction, as well as time. As described above, even in its simplest form this can result in a complexity that exceeds the grasp and speed of human interaction. On the other hand, first-person research is applied primarily through analogical reasoning. Analogical reasoning is often intuitive and typically does not require a great deal of abstraction. We reason analogically constantly, as we respond to contextual clues.

We can apply analogical reasoning by abstracting essential characteristics and applying those to two or more examples. For example, we may ask if a juvenile crime program that worked in one city would work in another by comparing demographics, allied services, culture, etc. However, typically we reason analogically by assuming or believing similarity among situations, not by analyzing and applying. Therefore, analogic reasoning can be organic, spontaneous, and nearly instantaneous. The majority of the decisions that are made *in situ* by people are made on an *ad hoc* basis.

Therefore, there is coherence between first-person claims and actual human social experiences. The ways that first-person claims are complex are the same ways

that human social experience is complex. Human social experience is richly complex, contingent, contestable, collaborative, and continually evolving and always finds its existence in a complex web of human relationships and contexts. First-person research approximates this endemic complexity not in a totalizing way of accounting for all of the contingencies of human social interactions (which is what third-person claims try to do) but by accounting more completely for one specific time-and-subject-bound contingency of a human social interaction.

There is further coherence between first-person claims and human social experiences in the way in which first-person claims lack complexity. People can and do use abstract reasoning of the kinds described above in deliberate and reflective manners in order to understand the past and plan for the future. Much more often, however, people are called upon by circumstances to respond in a particular moment. The simplicity of first-person claims that are as much about the look and the feel of a time and a place and a mood are much more easily called upon as resources in the moment-to-moment responses of actual human social interactions than the abstractions of third-person claims that require many conscious steps in order to be utilized. Although these responses may at first seem spontaneous and lacking in reflexivity, clearly they call the past into the present in order to act into a future by relying on past experiences or knowledge of analogically similar situations. Penman (2000) says that this is the basic communication function of finding a way to “go on” from wherever one is at any given moment. Thus, we can distinguish reflecting from

reflexivity by the deliberate character of reflecting. Reflecting is always marked by reflexivity, but reflexivity need not involve reflection.

These coherences are the source of the often-misunderstood claims to validity that first-person approaches make (although usually the term validity itself is not used). These claims are often criticized as, first, saying that there is no inherent truth to a social situation and then turning around and saying that first-person approaches get at the truth of the social situation better than third-person approaches do. The key distinguishing characteristic is between internal and external truths. An external observer, it is argued, can make no authoritative claims to truth about social events. However, an internal observer can make authoritative claims about a social event when they are first-person. These claims are, of course, only first-person claims to the extent that they clearly come from the author rather than from an abstracted voice of authority. Thus, first-person accounts do not attempt to get at the truth of the event, they attempt to get at the truth of communicating. Communicating is distinguished from communication because communicating can never be a subject. As soon as it is talked about, we move from first-person to third-person. We cannot state ultimate truths about communication, but we can represent communicating. Although my account of a communicative event is not the same as the event, it is nonetheless the same thing as my accounting. My accounting of the event is valid in form and function (as an event called an account), but not as a representation of some event. Thus, the criteria for validity of first-person claims are coherence and utility. These

two concepts actually overlap to a significant degree because knowledge that is useful is useful because it is coherent.

Clearly both first- and third-person claims offer a great deal of value—for different activities. There is a clear direct correlation between these claims and Martin Buber's (1970) concepts of "I-Thou" and "I-It" relating. In explaining his preoccupation with I-Thou, Buber (1970) said that he would be an advocate of I-It relationships in a world characterized predominantly by I-Thou relationships. Just as it was true that Buber's world was characterized by I-It, our world is often characterized by third-person approaches, not just in social scientific research, but also in media, interpersonal communicating, etc. As Buber noted, it is not possible, or even desirable, to eliminate I-It. Likewise, it is not possible, or even desirable, to eliminate third-person accounting. In this study, there will be (in fact, already has been) both first-person accounting and third-person accounting. However, following Buber's initiative, first-person approaches will be featured because I live in a world that privileges third-person approaches.

Axiological Choices

The form and means by which research accounts re-enter the lives of research participants are the moral dimensions of methodological choices. A third-person design re-enters participants' lives as they process the meaning of what they have just experienced. Much of the processing is a sort of informed guess. Certain mediated and personal conceptions of what goes on in research, as well as the subject of the research itself, will be in a conversation with the participant's actual experience of it.

Third-person research neither accounts for this conversation nor takes responsibility for its role in this conversation. “Accounting,” as it is used here, is a literal metaphor. Imagine an accountant’s spreadsheet that inventories all relevant liabilities and assets. The dialogue with the participants is not present in either column of the spreadsheet of the third-person researcher.

The dialogue with participants (and peers and self) *is* on the spreadsheet of first-person researchers. Which column and where may vary among researchers and studies, but it is there somewhere. The dialogue with participants is acknowledged in interactions with participants. Dialogue, as discussed in the previous chapter, is the maintenance of a tension between self and other. This tension may be maintained in planning a research project, in collecting data, or in reporting findings. Whatever the particulars, the key is being present as an individual, not as an abstracted “researcher” or “scientist” or “professor” or “consultant.”

Third-person researchers are accountable to their professional community of peers. Although they typically are obligated to treat their subjects and sites ethically, they are accountable for this to the community of peer reviewers on their institution’s Institutional Review Board, not to the subjects and sites themselves. First-person researchers are accountable to themselves and the participants in their research *as well as* their professional community of peers. Third-person researchers believe they are in only one conversation. The goal of this conversation is to establish validity. The conversation exists for the sake of something else (validity). First-person

researchers believe they are in many conversations. The goal in these conversations is to be coherent. Some of these conversations may exist for the sake of themselves.

The distinction between first and third-person is an imperfect distinction. A pure first-person or third-person approach may not exist, at least not in the social sciences. It goes beyond simple use of pronouns and active/passive sentence structure. The richness of the first/third-person distinction is best captured by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin when he differentiates between dialogue and dialectics, which correspond to first-person and third-person approaches respectively:

Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (1986, p. 147)

The partitioning of voices is removed in a third-person approach when the subjects are collapsed into categories according to “shared” qualities. It points at what is shared, declares that to be what is important, and leaves us to make the inference that the individuating characteristics are not important. Even studies that provide examples of particular phenomena, such as an example of masculine/instrumental communication style, do not provide individuation. No individuating markers can be supplied, other than perhaps further genericisms such as “Mary (not her real name), a 30-year old mother of one, said X.” Further, the purpose of providing such an example is not derived from the individual example itself, but from its quality of being just like all of the other data (or unlike in a particular way). Dialectic, as described by Bakhtin, is valid conversation. Dialogue is coherent conversation.

Cissna and Anderson (1998) argue that dialogue occurs in the form of “moments.” Thus, first-person approaches aspire to, and hopefully achieve, dialogue at unpredictable moments in a complex process that involves colleagues, research study participants, research procedures, research objects, peers, editors, students, professionals, and readers. First-person accounting is a *readiness* for dialogue but not a cause of dialogue. If third-person accounting happens upon dialogue accidentally, it is often denied or hidden in the form of claims of detachment and randomness in the procedure. The contemporary scientific principles of detachment and objectivity are the direct denial of the potential dialogue. It says, “dialogue could not have happened here so you can be confident that the dialectic is untainted.”

Implications of Methodological Choices

The systems-dialogic methodology I have been describing has distinct and unique implications for comporting oneself in the research process. Ordinarily, methodologies and procedures are treated as techniques for accomplishing a particular end or goal (a valid, replicable, and sometimes, useful study). However, techniques, by definition, are aligned with third-person approaches. Technique shares a root with technical and pertains specifically to ends rather than means. When techniques of conducting research are recommended, means are not ignored but are secondary to the desired ends. Desired ends are very specific, very technical (such as $p \geq .05$). The end may not justify any means, but a wide range of means is acceptable.

For example, in her article on re-relationalizing rapport, Jorgenson (1995) reviews the literature on techniques of establishing rapport with interviewees and

finds it lacking in relational dimensions. She says that much of the literature on establishing rapport in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes emphasizes instrumental justifications for establishing rapport. For example, she says that the goal of establishing rapport in a research setting is to subvert self-report bias. Fukuyama asserts that the efficacy of “rapport” is grounded in people’s desire to be recognized as unique human beings. However, to preserve validity, researchers have always been admonished not to “influence” the research subjects. But how does one recognize another human being without also being “recognizable” to them? If you are available as a unique individual to the interviewee, then you may taint the research. If you are not available as a unique individual to the interviewee, then you are unlikely to get open and honest responses. How is this technique to be utilized? Clearly it is self-contradictory.

However, Farson (1978) says of Carl Rogers’s oft-cited “technique” of person-centered therapy (which was essentially a first-person approach to therapy), “although he is credited with having developed a therapeutic technique, I believe that he was fundamentally describing a relationship which the therapist enters without the benefit of technique, meeting the client person to person” (p. 9). Like Rogers’s first-person therapy, first-person approaches focus on means rather than ends. A wide range of ends is acceptable, but the means are very specific. The means utilized in first-person approaches are dialogic relationships. In fleshing out the implications of a systems-dialogic methodology, I return to the tradition of dialogue that Cissna and Anderson (1994) say “conceives of dialogue as a form of human meeting or

relationship” (p. 10). They describe eight characteristics of dialogue in this tradition, some of which I applied in Chapter 2 to describe the dialogic character of a body of contemporary OD initiatives. Here I consider how five of those characteristics can direct us in building dialogic relationships for systems-dialogic methodology.

Immediacy of Presence

Presence describes a quality of some conversations where participants are present to one another rather than present to an agenda (explicit or implicit, overt or covert), concerned with identity management, or concerned with outside influences or distractions. This is the most profoundly first-person of these characteristics and recalls Bakhtin’s notion of individuating influences and voice. When presence is immediate, the other’s absolute uniqueness is the only thing before you. All social characteristics, including fundamentals such as age, gender, and race are not present. However, you may experience, for example, “the way X is going about being a 50-something, male, African-American” but only to the extent that it seems absolutely unique to that moment of interaction and not at all generalizable to “50-something” or “male” or “African-American.” This is somewhat problematic for a dialogic methodology because a researcher must necessarily enter into relationships with subjects in order to accomplish a purpose. But a certain centering is possible. Dialogue ultimately depends much more on what is going on *now* (immediacy) than how we got here (the past, even if the very recent past).

Immediacy of presence is severely threatened by beginning with well-developed concepts and even strong commitments to a particular research and

intellectual tradition. Bakhtin states unequivocally, “there are no truly dialogic relations with” classes of things (1986, p. 111). This is one of the most fundamentally revolutionary challenges to contemporary methodology. A well-developed construct, supported by a strong body of literature, which funnels down to a very specific question, is the hallmark of a “valuable contribution to knowledge” in the social sciences. However, it is extremely difficult to be present with a person when one’s research (upon which one’s livelihood depends) is based on data that must converge or diverge in a particular, patterned way. The culprit here is not the convergent or divergent patterns but the temporal placement of this requirement. If it is arrived at beforehand, as is typically the case, then all of the efforts of the researcher are going to be aimed at forcing the data into the *a priori* cone of convergence (divergence). Third-person validity is established usually as an answer to a well-conceived question. On the other hand, the first-person researcher asks *post facto*, if at all, what patterns can be found. It may be overstating the fact a bit, but it is kind of like asking the question after you hear the answers. Anderson (1997) calls this a “not-knowing” approach. She says that the first step in research should be to observe, listen, and account for how questions and theories emerge from the messiness of “not-knowing.”

It should be clear here I am not talking about throwing out our theories, methods, and other learnings. Contrary to what Watson (1996) asserts, first-person accounting does not mean that you can approach a subject without intellectual presumptions. You can approach a subject without intellectual preoccupations, and

you must, rather than suppress your intellectual presumptions, sometimes wear them on your sleeve. When Buber (1970) talks of presence in dialogue, he talks about a dynamic tension between self and other, maintaining the tension between an interest in others and a resolve to bring ourselves into the conversation. My account of an experience to one of my research participants or my asking a question, or expressing concern, fear, or joy brought out by other's talk sometimes catches interviewees off guard. More often, they have forgotten that they are being "interviewed." Buber's metaphor is that of a path along a narrow ridge. Straying from the narrow path leads you, on the one hand, into egoism and narcissism, and, on the other, into flattery. I am arguing for a dialogue between our disciplined and structured understanding of communication and participants' differently structured experience. In first-person research, we can read the subject as well as the researcher, at least sometimes.

Emergent, Unanticipated Consequences

The *a priori* requirements of third-person research mentioned above are unlikely to achieve immediacy of presence because they limit or even prohibit emergent and unanticipated consequences. In fact, third-person approaches typically define an unanticipated consequence as a problem. The researcher did not adequately delineate his or her constructs or did not adequately control the research setting. One of the greatest barriers to emergent and unanticipated consequences in a first-person approach is the cultural conditioning to which most participants are likely to be subject. The omniscient scholar is a cultural archetype that may predispose participants to defer to researchers and allow, or even encourage, researchers to set

the agenda and define the direction. In fact, after I have conducted interviews in this methodological style, interviewees have sometimes stated, “I hope you got what you were looking for” or “I don’t know if I was able to help you much.” This reflects their expectation that I would be fully in charge. In fact, I have been asked by a prospective interviewee to see the questions they were going to be asked so they could prepare their answers! Although I always have an interview “schedule” that guides me, I often ask open and probing questions that are not on the list. I rarely ask all of the questions on the list. Often the conversation moves fluidly enough that a topic gets covered without me asking about it.

A distinction can be made between the purpose for a relationship and the purpose for a conversation. Although the purpose for a conversation can get in the way of emergent unanticipated results, an instrumental purpose for a relationship is almost guaranteed to get in the way of emergent unanticipated results. As Jorgenson noted, third-person approaches have the same purpose for the relationship with the interviewee and the conversation with the interviewee—open and honest disclosure. First-person approaches share the purpose for the conversation with third-person approaches. But the purpose for the relationship with the interviewee in a first-person approach is different. It isn’t to obtain open and honest disclosure, it is to relate with that person for the value of relating to that person. This is where the centering mentioned above comes in.

Bamberger and Schon (1991) refer to the process of remaining open to emergent and unanticipated results as “chunking.” Chunking is a reflective

examination of the way we are structuring our understanding of what we are studying. With rigid *a priori* structures, change does not need to be provided for. Bamberger and Schon's metaphor of chunking suggests intentionally providing periodic occasions for reflecting on the direction and progress of the development of concepts, theories, and themes. These intentional reflections are in addition to the reflexive processes of evolution natural to first-person research. By allowing us more understanding of our own meaning-making process, chunking encourages us to be more open to what is emergent in our findings. Seeing those developments that are emerging is seeing communication and meaning-making in progress.

Collaborative Orientation

Traditionally we think of research as being primarily a one-way activity. A researcher seeks to get something from his or her subjects. In terms of information flow, subjects are more active and researchers more passive. Paradoxically, researchers exert great control, but profess not to influence the outcome. Subjects have little control beyond the choice to participate or not. In terms of control we think of the researcher as being active and the subjects as passive. In first-person research there can be no passivity. Collaboration in the creation of the content as well as in choosing the direction and tone of a conversation are inherent parts of first-person research. This is perhaps the most misunderstood dimension of dialogue.

Researchers can collaborate in the creation of content by, for example, mentally "jamming" with subjects (Eisenberg, 1998) or adding to or suggesting a metaphor, or fantasizing about a future together. They can collaborate on the

direction or tone by, for example, responding in the moment (immediacy of presence) to things that may seem tangential or metacommunicating about the interview, the study, the relationship between researcher and subject, or other's answers. These suggestions are all ways of recursively feeding impressions and interpretations back and forth between participants. Part of this process can also include reflecting on preliminary results with participants. This may work best when the researcher's conceptual and theoretical, as well as experiential, predispositions are shared with the participants.

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is perhaps the most identity-close issue of a dialogic method. It only requires a researcher not to open him or herself up to response but to be open to change by the other. "Neither ego protection nor protected ideas are the means or goals of dialogue; persons are willing to change" (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, p. 14). This change can be as simple as coming to think one thing rather than another (implied in collaborative orientation) or as profound as changes in attitude or values. This ultimately is part of "immediacy of presence." If you are not vulnerable, you are not bringing all of you with you.

Third-person approaches traditionally doesn't even consider this a possibility, or only considers it as aberrant behavior such as in the concern over "going native" for cultural anthropologists. First-person approaches not only accept it, but desires at least the possibility of it. A certain degree of vulnerability is necessary for reflexivity about the research questions or hypotheses. Only a certain degree of vulnerability

will allow one to see flaws and misdirections or missed opportunities mid-study, and make adjustments that take them into consideration. Secondary to research, but primary to learning, vulnerability also is necessary for a researcher to truly learn—about him or her self, relationships, life, and so on, from the acts of doing research.

Genuineness and Authenticity

Buber (1988) distinguishes between “being” and “seeming.” “Being” is more or less synonymous with genuineness and authenticity. For the researcher, this takes its most immediate form in the question of “gaining entry.” The relationship is narrowed in its context and possibility when impressions are consciously managed in order to gain entry, establish rapport, or worse, for simple ego gratification. This is a moral question as well as a practical one. Friedman (1983) refers to one’s level of genuineness and authenticity as equaling one’s commitment to another. We are committed to another when we are present with him or her, regardless of whether we think the consequences will be good or bad for us or the other. We are not committed to his or her presence if we try to make decisions or take actions on the other’s behalf (to protect the other, for example). We are not committed to our own presence if we are instrumental and put forward semblances to achieve a particular effect or goal.

Rogers (1989) speaks of being congruent with oneself in the moment. As a therapist he was making a revolutionary suggestion that therapists should be present with their clients. This means being disgusted if one is disgusted or crying for joy if one is moved to tears of joy. It is little less revolutionary in research. After all, think of the risks to which we would be vulnerable. Genuineness and authenticity require a

genuine interest in our research participants as well as in our research (or at least it requires that we choose to study that in which we are genuinely interested). And most importantly, it means behaving in ways that are consistent with our commitments. Participants know when they are being seduced, and research is more coherent and useful when results are the reflection of more dialogical relationships than of instrumental ones.

Methods Utilized

This study is based on observations of and interviews with a group of Tampa Bay area DOD practitioners as well as two facilitated group conversations. The group, which calls itself the OD SIG, started nearly ten years ago with a core of OD practitioners in this area who were members of the Organizational Development Special Interest Group (OD SIG) of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). Since then, they have taken on a somewhat independent identity. They have monthly meetings and do not require membership in ASTD, although many members do maintain strong ties to that organization and they continue to use “OD SIG” to refer to the group.

They meet the second Friday of each month from 9:15 to 12:00. For a long time these meetings took place in a large conference room at a local Girl Scouts council in the Westshore business district of Tampa. In March of 2000, the group moved to the conference room of a personnel recruiting company, also in the Westshore district. Later, the group moved to a conference room at an executive outplacement company on Rocky Point overlooking Tampa Bay and the Howard

Frankland Bridge. Basically, membership is limited only by interest and awareness of the group. Thus, each meeting consists pretty much of “whomever shows up.”

The group’s email list (which is updated several times a year) contains approximately 80 addresses. Each month about 15 to 30 people show up. Informal polls show that a majority are independent DOD consultants/trainers, although a few are employed by a single organization or by consulting firms. There is a core group that seems to be at every meeting, including myself for the last 3 years. The group’s blend of informality and commitment is often commented on as being the product of “chaos theory” or the result of “self-organizing processes.” At the first meeting I attended, in December of 1999, one of the group’s members led a planning session to determine the group’s meetings through March of 2001.

Monthly meetings consist of presentations and workshops on DOD topics. A “sponsor” member often presents these workshops and presentations, although “outside experts” are also sometimes brought in. The group’s first exposure to me was in the role of “outside expert.” The October 1999 meeting utilized an article written by Denys Blell and myself titled “Interpersonal Skills for Success in a Diverse Society” (Blell & Kreisher, 1999). I was out of town and unavailable, but my coauthor attended and facilitated that month’s meeting.

My initial reason for joining was the recommendation of my coauthor that the group was very professional and progressive. He felt I could learn a lot from the group. I became a member in order to reap the benefits of membership. This

research project emerged as I reflected over the course of several months on what I was witnessing.

Having come into OD from an interest in social justice, I was a bit concerned about whether I would fit in and be accepted. I am at ease with a variety of people but have sometimes found that “corporate types” view me as naïve and idealistic. I was also a bit skeptical about whether the group would suit my needs for professional development. Most of my exposure to human and organizational development initiatives in corporations reeked of exploitation and instrumental orientations toward others. I have since learned that this was a bit naïve on my part. Not only is it not true of this group, it doesn’t seem to be true generally of corporate human and organizational development initiatives.

The most interesting thing to me about this group was the degree to which most members were interested in social justice, quality of life, and process inclusion. Not only did I fit in, I realized that I had much I could learn from them. In this group I found the living embodiment of the growing movement I labeled DOD in the previous chapter.

This group as a whole seems high on internal motivation toward professionalism in DOD practice as witnessed by their continuing involvement in this group, which is a sort of voluntary development seminar for DOD practitioners (hence, “Developing Organizational Development” as the title of this dissertation). Many have shown a propensity and motivation to inquire into basic assumptions of their practice as well, which Hyde (1995) calls “ontological inquiry.” Consistent with

Hyde's framing of this concept, those in the group who engage in ontological inquiry understand and articulate the ways in which ontological inquiry about oneself is intimately connected to practices such as their professional work.

On August 11, 2000, I led a group discussion at that month's group meeting to facilitate this sort of ontological inquiry. This inquiry focused on what is dialogic about OD work. The session lasted about two and one-half hours, and functioned as the regularly scheduled monthly meeting. I began the conversation with a five-minute narrative about how I had come to be interested in dialogue and OD. For the remainder of the conversation I simply tried to keep people on the topic of dialogue and OD and generally to behave in a dialogic manner. This session was tape recorded and transcribed.

In addition, from November of 2000 until May of 2001, I conducted interviews with members of the OD SIG. When I began to solicit members to interview, I appealed directly to the dual motives of professional and personal development. I framed my appeal for their involvement as a continuation or extension of the purpose of the meetings—becoming a more effective, as well as socially engaged OD practitioner by reflecting on one's self and work.

I conducted interviews with 15 members of the OD SIG, including all three of the founders. All of the interviewees had practiced OD for more than five years (ranging up to 27 years). Most of the interviews (13 of the 15) were with "regulars" at the OD SIG. One was new to the group (but not to OD), and one had recently left the OD profession to become a hospice pastor (but had been a regular at the OD SIG

until just before the interview). The interviews were loosely structured in accordance with the values I have been describing above--voluntary, audio taped, and subject to informed consent. Although there was a great deal of variation in the conversations, as would be expected from first-person research, some questions that were asked of most interviewees are:

1. Are you internal or external?⁵
 - a. Have you always been?
2. What do you consider to be your specialty or specialties?
3. How long have you been doing DOD work?
4. What motivated you to do DOD?
5. What do you see as the main justification of DOD to yourself?
6. What do you sell as the justification of DOD to managers and executives?
7. How do you explain DOD to people who are not “in the know”?
8. Describe an example of successful and unsuccessful change.
9. Can you describe your best and worst moments as a DOD practitioner?
10. Describe an ideal consulting experience, including the outcome.

The use of “DOD” in these sample questions is meant to substitute for language that was specific to each interview. I did, during most interviews, share my concept of DOD with the participants, but I substituted language specific to their personal work for DOD. For example, for someone who identified his or her

⁵ In OD parlance, “internal” is someone who is employed full time for the purpose of developing a company’s employees. “External” is someone who works for a consulting company with multiple client companies or independently as a consultant with multiple client companies.

specialty as “Appreciative Inquiry,” question #3 was “How long have you been doing ‘Appreciative inquiry’?”

Then, in June of 2001, I conducted a second group inquiry, which invited reflection on my preliminary results. This session lasted two and one-half hours and functioned as the regularly scheduled meeting for that month. I summarized, in about 45 minutes, my initial findings. The remainder of the time was spent in group conversation about the findings. During this conversation I intervened only to keep the conversation on topic and generally dialogic. This conversation was recorded and transcribed, although the batteries on my tape recorder ran out toward the end of the session without me realizing it. Although, regretfully, I lost some recordable and transcribeable data, what was said in the closing portion of this meeting was entirely consistent with the many hours of group inquiry and interviews that were recorded and transcribed. It seemed neither necessary, nor was it even possible, to redo that portion of the meeting in some way.

My analysis of the interviews and group conversations was fairly unstructured. I listened to tapes after each session or interview and reflected on what I had learned and considered any themes I encountered. When all data collection was complete, I listened to all of the tapes again. I transcribed both of the group conversations and selected selections from the individual interviews that I deemed interesting (in regard to identity, dialogue, alienation, etc.). I then incorporated them into a number of themes, which evolved over a number of months until I arrived at the organization that appears in Chapter 5.

Finally, in November 2001, one of the members conducted an appreciative inquiry session in order to plan for upcoming meetings. She began by facilitating a group inquiry into the things most valued by the group. The outcome of that session, along with my notes from it, are also treated as data in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

First-person addresses the problem of a researcher's relationship to his or her research subjects presented by an understanding of structural coupling. Structural coupling problematizes the customary belief in control and distance in research. First-person approaches maximize the opportunity for dialogue.

Part of relating to your subjects also is the formulation of your results. There are many ways of going about this. What I have chosen to do in Chapter 5 is to develop with my participants a set of themes that pertain to the issue of alienation and OD in their particular experience of it. I have done this both passively, by looking, listening, and pondering as well as by reflecting with participants, individually and in groups, about the themes that seemed to be emerging.

Part of doing first-person research also is accounting for the researcher's presence and the various tensions and boundary issues. These issues are essentially commentary on the process of doing the research. An account of these tensions and boundary issues can be found in the Epilogue, following Chapter 6.

In the next chapter, I present the themes that were developed in conjunction with the research participants. These interviews, observations and focused ontological inquiries generated a number of different contemplations on the topic of

subjectivity in the work of DOD consultants as they work to mitigate and transform alienation.

CHAPTER 5

A LABORATORY FOR SELF-PARTICIPATION

In Chapter 2, I presented the sharply contrasting voices of the academic and professional literatures. On the one hand, there was optimism about the possibilities of transformation of exclusionary hierarchies and disenfranchisement that contribute to the reduction of alienation. On the other hand, there was the skeptical charge of “more of the same.” Central to these divergent voices is the issue of subjects and identities that I raised in Chapter 1.

This chapter presents the voices of actual DOD practitioners produced through my interviews, focus groups, and observation. Their voices are complex and diverse and not entirely separable from mine. They speak in unison on little and have many textures and nuances to their thoughts. This sort of multiplicity resists conflation and boundary drawing. I try here to preserve the diversity of those voices by weaving them together as a series of conversations while also identifying some central themes that emerge from their comments. These conversations took place over time and in different spaces and contexts. Where possible I have tried to account for those contexts, while maintaining the idea that these people are having a conversation about doing DOD work. The first section of this chapter, “Developing Themes,” describes how the themes discussed later in the chapter were developed reflexively and with the

involvement of the participants. The next section, “A Shared Value for Dialogue,” presents the first theme, the results of an Appreciative Inquiry facilitated by a member of the OD SIG that was intended to help plan and develop upcoming OD SIG meetings. The remainder of the chapter includes descriptions of the remaining five themes developed in conjunction with the participants in the research. The second theme, “People Who *Do* This Stuff” distinguishes OD practitioners who are committed to the actual participants in their efforts, and not just to the organization’s interests. The third, “Inside and Outside,” focuses on the literal and figurative positioning that these consultants must do in order to be someone who does this work. The fourth and fifth, “The Greater Good” and “Personal Benefits,” bring together two categories from Oldenburg (1999). Oldenburg treats these as dual consequences of communal places he calls “third places.” I have chosen to apply them here because these consultants have also indicated these dual functions to their work. Finally, I have focused on “Fear” as an essential circumstance of this orientation against alienation.

Developing Themes

After completing all of my interviews, I presented my “preliminary” findings to the OD SIG. These preliminary findings included variations of four of the five final themes: people who *do* this stuff, inside/outside, the greater good, and personal benefits. It did not include “a shared value for dialogue” or “fear.”

I had developed four themes presented as preliminary results by a process similar to “chunking,” advocated by Bamberger and Schon (1991). The process of chunking began entirely unintentionally. As stated in Chapter 4, I began attending the meetings solely for the purpose of developing my abilities as an OD practitioner. Somewhere in this process, before I developed the research agenda represented here, I began to develop ideas about alienation in regard to members of this group. The chunking of data into these themes thus began before I ever knew I had a research project.

I attended meetings for several months before I considered making the OD SIG the object of my dissertation research. I then discussed the idea with two of the group’s founders. I explained to them that I was considering doing research on the group or individuals from the group because I found the group’s proclivity toward dialogue and reflexivity interesting, along with their strong “social agenda.” They encouraged the idea and suggested that the entire group might benefit from the work as well. Their rationale was that explicitly focusing on the reflexive processes that were so important to the group may further the cause of reflexive processes. This chu

Throughout my observations, facilitated group sessions, and interviews, the members of the OD SIG always seemed to regard me as an OD professional doing research for his dissertation rather than as an outside researcher. In addition to my “membership” predating my research, two other regular attendees were doing doctoral dissertation research about the same time, one of them with subjects from the

OD SIG. Also, graduate degrees are common among the participants, with most having at least master's degrees. Finally, I was working on different OD projects with four of the participants in this research, so they knew me as an OD practitioner, rather than as a student or researcher. Probably for some combination of these reasons, I was regarded as an OD professional member of the group doing research rather than as an academic doing research "on" the OD SIG.

I discussed my desire to do my dissertation research within the OD SIG with the founders to get their feedback (not their approval as they make it clear that they don't actually "run" things). I was previously scheduled to lead one of the regular monthly meetings. The topic was dialogue and I was invited to facilitate because I was recognized as an "expert" although that word is always used very loosely with this group. There were two people who consulted on my development of the session on dialogue.⁶ Together, we decided to *do* dialogue, not just talk about it. So we decided I should try to facilitate a dialogue about dialogue in OD practice.

After doing the session on dialogue, I looked at my field notes before I did the interviews and considered the themes that surfaced over and over in the OD SIG. In this way, my orientation to the interviews was developed. While my questions (see Chapter 4) were very broad, they focused on the issues of identity and motive (self-definition) that were becoming significant to me in my preliminary reflections and conversations with participants.

⁶ It is common for sessions to have one or two primary presenters and a couple of assistants who help with development but may not actually be involved in the presentation.

As I conducted interviews, which lasted over a five-month period, I looked back at my previous interview notes and transcripts of the group conversation about dialogue, and considered the similarities and differences that were emerging. As the interviews progressed, I often interjected my thoughts on a theme, usually by quoting another interviewee, and asking the current interviewee to respond. With this process, I developed the four themes: people who *do* this stuff, inside/outside, the greater good, and personal benefits.

As I listened to members' responses (live and recorded) to the presentation of my preliminary results, it solidified and defined these categories for me. In fact, Janice, one of the participants, named the theme "inside and outside" and Chuck named the theme "people who *do* this stuff." As I listened, I also began to notice something else. Perhaps I framed the DOD consultants as brave and noble. On a couple of occasions, subjects seemed to be responding to this by reminding me that this is very scary work and that they are not always up to the challenges that face them. I looked back at the interviews and field notes and decided that I had neglected this theme. Thus, the theme "fear" was born.

The final theme, "a shared value for dialogue" emerged for me during a second planning session held in November 2001. The planning session was facilitated by one of the members having expertise in "Appreciative Inquiry" (AI). The purpose for this session was to derive a plan for upcoming meetings by focusing on the best aspects of current and past meetings. Using Appreciative Inquiry, a set of

“core values” was produced by the participants. The values themselves were developed by the members of the OD SIG present that day (including me). My discussion of them here is a synthesis of my observations, notes, and reflections on the work of the group that day.

A Shared Value for Dialogue

As I mentioned earlier, the theme of A Shared Value for Dialogue emerged during an Appreciative Inquiry session in November 2001. Those present that day compiled a list that suggests that dialogue is one of the primary things they see as their common orientation—indeed, they mentioned dialogue several times throughout the conversation realized that it was perhaps the over-arching theme that defined their being together in this group. They described a number of dialogically oriented sub-themes that marked their appreciation for the group. I consider each.

A Place to Be Authentic

Their appreciation for OD SIG as a place to be authentic came up first and most often in the session. Participants talked about two distinctly different things in regard to authenticity. First, they felt that other group members value authenticity. This seems to give them a sense of security and belonging. Second, they expressed a value for the kinship of spirits that ensures that their authentic actions will be interpreted and valued as such. They say they are understood in more than just the sense of someone understanding their words or intents. *They* are understood, in addition to their words.

An Opportunity to Learn

The opportunity to learn also was discussed frequently. Although they made it clear that they value an opportunity to learn about things relevant to their profession, they also included valuing opportunities to learn for the sake of learning and consider this to be the best forum. When one person stated that general opportunities to learn were one of the things they love about the job and especially the group, several others agreed. Learning is valued above knowledge. Further, especially when considered with the other items on this list, it seems that they value the form of learning that comes from dialogue and ontological inquiry, rather than learning specific units of information.

Content Comes from Us—Is Collaborative in Form

Participants appreciate that the work that is done in the OD SIG is frequently collaborative—the form that they value most. The consulting they do often requires compromises and approximations. The OD SIG, on the other hand, is organized by DOD professionals, for DOD professionals. It is organizational life created in their own image—and they value collaboration, participation, and dialogue. Both the appreciative inquiry session that generated this item and the planning session a year or so earlier reflect the collaborative nature of the group. In fact, some of the participants identify “strategic planning” as their specialty. These strategic planning processes, like the two just mentioned, are geared toward involving stakeholders in

processes. This particular thing that the participants value in the OD SIG is something that they do explicitly in their jobs as well.

Different Perspectives are Shared

Some participants admit that it is difficult sometimes to remain open to different perspectives in an environment that does not value them. At the OD SIG, they are comfortable hearing different perspectives and attitudes and feel enriched rather than confronted by them. They feel that they are more genuinely themselves because of this openness to difference.

Diversity of Experiences and Approaches

Each of the participants has unique experiences and approaches to everyday and complex issues. This is easy for most people to accept. However, it is not common for everyday processes to value and include diversity. These participants voice their appreciation that the group operates in such a way as to maximize and benefit from that diversity. One example given was a “team building forum” where anyone with team building activities was invited to present them. They divided the available time by the total number of presenters to arrive at each person’s allotment. This format, they argued, values multiplicity over “experts.”

Opportunity for Real Sharing

OD is what this group exists for. However, members of this group value its personal dimensions. The external consultants are most vocal about this. They say that this group fulfills their “co-worker” or “colleague” role. In fact, one of the

founders has the December, holiday party-themed, meeting at her home. In a group of kindred spirits, participants find opportunities for real sharing. This exclusively human element, they say, is what makes this group special to them, not what they learn about OD. The “check-in” that precedes each session, which is as likely to be about one’s families, hopes, or fears, as it is to be about their latest project, seems to me to reinforce this.

Discuss What We See as Needs of Organizations Today

Participants discussed the importance of keeping up with trends in OD and business in general. However, they also discussed their ideas about the *needs* of organizations today. The distinction is fluid for them, but they discuss the broad trends and directions talked about by pundits and experts, their gut reactions “from the field,” and their own hopes and dreams for the organizations they are working with and for organizations in general.

An Opportunity to Get to Know What Others Do and to Partner on Projects

Partnering on projects is much more than just a desire to get work, they say. In fact, pimping yourself for work has been explicitly disallowed at these meetings. Rather, these OD professionals express a desire for work to be collaborative and unfolding. They say that they want to partner with others in their work at least as much for the experience of working together as for pragmatic reasons such as shared workload or the ability to take on larger projects.

An Opportunity to Get into Conversation

Participants point out that they simply appreciate the opportunity to be in a conversation. Although this sounds like a general value, it implies a value for a particular type of conversation. Clues to the characteristics of that conversation can be found in the other items they listed as things they value about the OD SIG meetings: conversation that is authentic, includes opportunities for learning, is collaborative, values and includes diverse voices and the uniqueness of individuals, and involves a real meeting of people. Unintentionally, it seems, the DOD practitioners have made a good list of the characteristics of dialogue.

In developing their best experiences and core values of the OD SIG, the participants seemed to distinguish between things and processes. They don't just like to learn *about* OD, they like learning. They don't collaborate because it results in higher quality outcomes, they like collaborating. They don't value diversity because they *should*, they value diversity for the uniqueness in the voices. They don't come to the meetings just to learn about OD, they come for camaraderie and mutual connection. Although they are, of course, cognizant that the *thing* that brings them together is OD, they are also cognizant that they come here for much more. This "much more" seems to be consistent with OD values and principles, but is a living, organic *process*, not a thing.

People Who *Do* This Stuff

These consultants generally agree that this group often is a laboratory for the sort of interactions described above. They acknowledge how this group affects their personal paths of development, their appreciation of each other, how they learn and grow inside and out of the group, their hopes and dreams for how it could or might be improved. They also share their perceptions about what is different about what they are doing. Central to this, it seems, is distinguishing (and valuing) people who demonstrate a commitment to the individuals in organizations with whom they work, in addition to organizational interests.

In one of the focus groups that I facilitated, Chuck was reflecting on why he keeps coming back to the group meetings. He was one of five people at the very first OD SIG meeting. He began to come for fairly instrumental reasons—he wanted to learn new techniques and programs to help with his job. Although he admits that this is still what he tells his boss that he needs four hours once a month for, he admits to being inspired by the shared ambition of having a positive impact on people’s often dismal experience of work. Chuck distinguishes “people who do this [OD] stuff” from “people who *do* this stuff.” His emphasis on “*do*” refers to people who try to live their lives in ways that are consistent with principles of dialogue at the heart of this sort of OD practice. He refers to the passion for personal and organizational development and growth that many people bring to this group. These are the things that keep him coming back. In fact, he has been inspired and transformed by the

ambitions of many of the people he has met here. In his own language, he used to “do this stuff” but now he “*does* this stuff.”

Carmen affirmed what Chuck said. She said she finds a sense of hope and vision in the passion of people who *do* this stuff. “I do find the passion of the group to be a very big draw. The people who are interesting in life to me are people who are passionate about what they do, who are passionate about what they can do, passionate about what they might do.” In response to this statement (made in a group session facilitated by me), someone inserted a joke about how “we come together to steal materials from each other.” This is the ultimate “in” joke for the group. Despite the fact that this could be a genuine fear about participating in this group, it collects a good laugh, possibly because it is so implicitly understood that “stealing materials” is not what happens here. But Carmen is on a roll and she seizes on the joke and turns it around. She insists it is correct, but not in the way the joker meant it. Instead, she insists that it isn’t about the ideas and information we share, but “whatever else” we share. When this is met with looks that seem to say “go on,” she says the group and “the huge power that is in this room to transform lives and organizations and people” humble her. She is not shy, she says. She admits she is not even what most people would call humble, but she is humbled by the presence of the people in the room. She is humbled by the presence of people who *do* this stuff. Carmen concludes that thought by admitting, “I am a change management consultant because I want to make the world a better place.” Sensing the lack of humility in that final statement she

quickly jokes, “I am not a Miss America candidate, but I do want to end world hunger.”

At this point Janice interjected, “For me it comes back to dialogue; the miracle of it is that in the process I feel like I keep getting tripped.” This seemingly ambiguous statement is met with a chorus of agreement. On a separate occasion, Janice confessed to me that, more than anything else, she is drawn to OD for what she learns about herself. “I think we can practice what we preach. And we do have some tools like dialogue to see us through.” She trips over her self—her identity and her assumptions about who she is and who others are. Tripping makes her take a moment to look around at herself and others while she is getting back up again.

But she also admitted that doing this work leaves her little time to focus on what she loves most about her work, reflecting on what she has learned about herself in relation to others. She wants to reflect on, document, and apply the things she is learning more systematically. In this respect, being an independent consultant makes Janice “sad.” Her “vision would be to have a three story house in south Tampa and we would all have our own business but we would have an umbrella too. If the right thing came along and I said ‘this is too much to handle’ and I would invite X and Y It would be very fluid.” For Janice, “too much to handle” doesn’t seem to be so much about the difficulty of the work as it is about the difficulty presented by a quantity of presence. There are so many identities and agendas, and interactions among those identities and agendas, that she is sometimes overwhelmed with the task

of understanding it all. She is overwhelmed by the complexity of the work she is trying to do because she is unwilling or unable, in Bakhtin's (1986) terms, to "cram everything into one abstract consciousness."

Carl provided me with this somewhat cynical, but instructive, analogy for the heritage of OD training that may help understand what Janice was saying: "There's an aquarium with clean water and one with dirty water. So you get this bright idea. You scoop three fish out of the dirty water and put them in the clean water. Within minutes they are swimming around and happy, with little fish smiles on their faces. So you put them back and take three more That is corporate training." It seems that Janice doesn't need help getting the fish into the other aquarium or demonstrating how great it is to be in a clean aquarium. These are solutions that can be administered to any fish. She may need help getting her mind around the complexity of the relationships that have led to a dirty aquarium. She seems to be saying that she needs someone to trip her occasionally.

Janice says her sadness comes from not being able to share dialogue and reflection with other like-minded individuals as often as she would like. It should come as no surprise, then, that Janice is one of the founders of the OD SIG. The OD SIG meets once a month, unlike Janice's vision of a three-story house cum office, where contact would presumably be more frequent. Nonetheless, Janice is unequivocal that her motive in helping to start the OD SIG was to have a little piece of her vision of a community of like-minded learners. If there were any ambiguity

left about the “likeness” of those minds, Janice yearns for “a larger consciousness of the difference that difference can make in the community and the difference OD can make. Not only in bottom line results but in personal [results] too . . . [your work] stands in relief when you are not caught up in your own stuff.”

Not being caught up in one’s own stuff is what keeps the group going.

Another of the co-founders, Elaine, declares “one of the things I love about our group is that we don’t just come together to espouse our expertise and sell what we are to everyone else.” She sees it as a place where she can be vulnerable about who she is as a consultant and a person—a face she feels she can’t typically show to clients.

In addition to this emphasis on committing one’s self to the process, my research produced much talk that used the metaphors of “inside” and “outside.” To the consultants these terms seem to be much more than just a designation of whether one is an in-house consultant or an independent outside consultant. They clearly understand that these are relational terms and that these positions have real implications for doing OD work.

Inside and Outside

Inside and outside is more than just a reference to where one works. Many of these consultants see the necessity to be both of these in order to do the work of mitigating alienation. If they are “inside” they run the risk of being too committed to the interests of the organization to work on the alienation of employees. If they are “outside” entirely, they are too disconnected from the fray to be able to offer timely

and contextual help. The main point of the tension between inside and outside is that they find that they monitor and manage their “position” in relation to other stakeholders in the process.

Interestingly, my own relationship to the group doesn’t seem to reinforce that this is entirely necessary. The logic of the above paragraph would suggest that I cannot be entirely “inside” the OD SIG, or I will be too committed to the interests of the group to fulfill the goals of my research (an “outside” interest). On the other hand, I can’t be “outside” entirely or my conducting research will not be relevant or helpful. However, I have already argued that I am perceived by members of the OD SIG as being entirely “inside.” I also find that I perceive myself as being entirely inside the OD SIG. It may be that the OD SIG presents a different challenge than that faced in consulting to traditional organizations. A traditional organization may present a special challenge to the identities of these DOD consultants because it is a part of the dominant system of subject construction that disfavors reflexivity and dialogue. The need to be partly “outside” may stem from the need to be partially insulated from this system of subject construction in order to be and to facilitate self-participation. If the OD SIG succeeds more often than not in being a place where self-participation is not only advocated, but also practiced and facilitated, then I would not need to monitor so aggressively the boundary between inside and outside to prevent becoming too much of either one for my own good.

Carl comments on a book by Peter Senge that he has been reading. It says that after five years people are fast-tracking and working 70 hours a week or have checked out and wait for the evenings and weekends when they can do what they deem valuable. Carmen suggests that OD consultants embody a third alternative, “A lot of us have checked out. Checked out from the norm we are taught. We are taught from childhood right through the MBA program how to be a good employee. We are never taught along the way how to be outside the system. And it’s hard to be outside the system.” Janice affirms this difficulty: “you’re not taken care of anymore.” By this I think she means not taken care of ontologically—not constituted as a well-defined subject. She admits this is a challenge, as it must be done by oneself.

For Janice, being “outside” appears to be a problematic notion. “You can’t be totally out because you won’t get it at all. But you can’t be totally in too, because you are caught up in what is going on. When I worked for Z, I was there three days a week and they provided me an office I was in but I was never on the team.” Janice is apparently sad, once again, about not being “on the team.” But she values this boundary. She feels that being somewhat of an outsider enables her to perceive things about herself, the organization, and the relationship between the two. She also asserted that this perception is mandatory for the performance of DOD work. Donya also notes another advantage to being outside, “A lot of what I end up doing is saying what a lot of other people are saying. But somehow if you get paid for saying it you get a lot more response.”

Interestingly, getting heard within the OD SIG does not seem to require careful attention to inside and outside. Although I actually came to the OD SIG for the first time as an outside “expert,” I was acknowledged as “inside” when I started attending regular meetings. Nonetheless, I have been asked to present, to work with members on projects (jobs outside of OD SIG), and have been encouraged in doing this research. Clearly, the OD SIG differs from organizational settings such as that to which Donya refers above.

There is a bit of a conundrum in this duality of inside and outside. From the perspective of subjectivity, they seem to be asserting that it is good to be an outsider because it enhances your perceptions about relationships and identities. However, the downside is that you must shoulder more responsibility for your own subjectivity. Not only *can* you attend to it, but you *must*. Janice seems to be pointing out the double-edged sword of living outside of organizational determinations of subjectivity. Organizational determination can be understood as freedom from a particular kind of angst that comes from uncertainty about who one is, where one belongs, how one should or can be, and so on. This is not to discount the entirely different kind of angst highlighted in Chapter 1.

This responsibility for one’s subjectivity may not be a choice so much as it is an involuntary change. Brett observes,

You know this also reminds me of Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* when you take historically how the whole world has changed with this metaknowledge of something “more” to life [than organizational goals narrowly conceived] and every subsequent development subsumes—doesn’t

eliminate—but says “that’s now a subset.” It used to be our main framework. Once we step beyond it and are reflexively aware of its limitations, we keep it [the former frame of reference] but it is now a subset of a greater awareness.

Becoming aware of the possibility of participating in his own subjectivity compels Brett to pursue it. It is not really voluntary. In fact, many of the others say that they “were meant to do this,” “were called to do this,” or “can’t imagine doing anything else” in reference to why they do DOD work. Carmen even admits, “I’ve taken jobs because I knew that if I left *nobody* would pick up the banner and run.”

Being an “outsider,” at least in part, is crucial to the identity of these OD professionals. Most of them have become independent consultants after doing similar work for a company (or companies). Carl argues that OD is in opposition to human resources (HR). He argues that HR makes rules designed to “keep the lid on things” whereas OD works to tear the lid off. Carl wants to see OD professionals use dialogue “to solicit people’s involvement while understanding the rules of the organization.” The “lid” in Carl’s metaphor doesn’t signify chaos so much as it signifies the opposite of control—participation.

Gary also talks about this dilemma of enmeshed systems:

Typical planning sessions or redesign sessions are done by a relatively small group of people, a representative group usually, and they go off and they try to keep themselves well-connected to the organization but they are typically isolated by the nature of what they are doing—they are doing something kind of “offline”—and they come back and they have spent 3, 4, 5 days off at a retreat on a mountaintop somewhere and the white smoke has risen out of the chimney and they come back and they have 1 or 2 lines of a vision statement to show for several days worth of work and they kind of bounce it off the organization and usually it bounces off and falls on the ground sort of thing. People are always amazed, “why didn’t they embrace this, we spent all this

time and energy . . .” The difficulties and resistance they feel is because nobody was involved in that.

In Gary’s scenario, even people fully “inside” the organization who operate separately in some way for just a few days can encounter some of the “outsider” problems with which these consultants deal daily.

These DOD consultants also define themselves as “other” in addition to “outside.” They realize that their objectives often don’t match up with the objectives of organizations. Myron admits that OD can be a hard sell to organizational decision makers sometimes because, “The role of OD is in natural tension with that *quarterly* report . . . It takes a special kind of external emphasis or an external ‘pain’ factor to get executives to the long term. Its not natural in American companies.” Myron doesn’t identify with people who think like this. In some ways, as we saw above, they regard the OD SIG as a sanctuary from that sort of thinking and being.

Helen also feels as if she is “different,” regardless of whether she is in her role as a nurse, DOD practitioner, or hospice chaplain:

I’m very intuitive and I am in a world that is very left-brain linear-sequential and how to make it in that world when you think so differently . . . to say, “Okay, that is how the game is played, lets see how I can make a difference.” I think I also had fantasies of being able to do it right according to my value system and control or minimize the dis-ease by putting that humanistic face on things. The compassion and how we implement change with the understanding that these are people who have lived their lives over here and are being asked to jump the fence. And bless you if you don’t want to jump the fence, but how can we help you to your next adventure.

Helen has had the revelation of seeing herself trying to force change in people. This understanding brought about a greater humility for her as she realized she was

introducing people to her own value system, not just to what may be a “better” way of doing things.

In addition to the relational issues dredged up by “inside” and “outside,” the consultants reflected on their understandings of their own motivations and who they think they are in relation to their work and their world. This understanding of their complex motives included both an orientation toward the greater good and personal benefits. Virtually all of the participants identified motives of both kinds.

The Greater Good

For the greater good is one reason that is given for working against alienation. None of the participants was idealistic enough to say that they only do this work for the benefit of others. However, all of the interviewees, and many of the others in the group sessions, presented rationales for how their work benefits others. This benefit generally involves promoting dialogue and diminishing alienation.

Donya said, in regard to the question of why she chooses to work specifically in organizations, “I really like to help. I do so in organizations because that is where people are. I hope to affect them positively so that it is not just better for them at work, but at home too. And it spreads out from there.” This may be the most straightforward and simple expression of a greater social consciousness and activism, but there are many more to be found.

George is one of the few OD SIG members who is still an “internal” consultant. He heads up the training and development department of a local

municipality. George's "check-in" at the outset of each meeting is among the most consistent in the group. George always begins by telling us how screwed up things are administratively at his job. George has a real gift for drama. He sighs, looks down, and pauses dramatically before beginning. The room quiets, heads turn, he makes eye contact with several individuals, draws a deep breath and after a pregnant pause someone will smile and say, "Let's have it, George" or just emit a quizzical "Yes?" He will launch into a vivid narrative—perhaps about how there is a new city manager who is trying to keep everyone on their toes by being unpredictable, but George's interpretation is that the city manager is creating a great deal of anxiety and fear, which George has to smooth over. Or maybe it's that budget cuts are necessitating reorganization, which George casts as a great opportunity to make positive changes. Or there is a major conflict going on between two top administrators that is dividing and polarizing the administration. George is disdainful of the self-centeredness of these administrators and feels frustrated because his subordinate position in the organization prevents him from addressing the real issues.

It may sound as if George is a real whiner or drama queen. However, he recounts these ordeals with the enthusiasm of a connoisseur. If he overdramatizes details, his audience seems to indulge him and to attribute this to his passion for his work rather than to a desire to gain pity. Indeed, this crowd sympathizes a great deal with George. The atmosphere almost feels like a Gospel Church during George's check-in. Rather than "amen" and "right on, brother George" the audience interjects

a gasp when George describes an unethical move, laughter and head nodding when he narrates managerial myopia, and utters affirmation that seems to be more of his persona than of the validity of his assessment. There seems to be a spirit of “you speak to us all.”

Many of these OD professionals say that they got “out” because they found both of Senge’s alternatives untenable: being married to the job or alienated altogether. Donna expresses very well the mitigation of alienation that is a common theme with this group:

I spent a lot of time in internal positions⁷ feeling underutilized. And I am no different than 99% of the population. I felt not stimulated and not challenged . . . I remember thinking when I was doing management development “you know if they would only let me play with the big boys I could do some powerful stuff.” But they are not going to let me play with the big boys. They want me to go sit in my corner and be quiet and do some training—not make that training mean something in the organization.

Janice admits to very personal reasons for being a consultant: “when we talk about that compliance stuff I find myself resisting, when we talk about alignment, I just find myself wanting to push back a little bit.” By compliance she is talking about doing such things as writing employee conduct codes or measuring performance standards. Alignment is a supposedly “progressive” alternative to compliance that suggests that employees should be “enrolled” voluntarily in organizational objectives. Clearly a good deal of coercion can still be involved in “alignment.” Janice goes on to suggest that fear is the driving force behind her work. She imagines an

⁷ “Internal” refers to working for a company as a training and development specialist for employees of that company.

organization as a dance and fear as the contribution many people make to the dance. This is the primary mechanism of compliance. When Janice stated this in a focus group, many of the others jumped on this. They concur that they work to get people to forgo compliance in favor of commitment.

Carmen observed with frustration that, “We all have been asked to put together or write up, sometime in our career, a dress code because somebody couldn’t carry on a dialogue with the person who had gone beyond the boundary.” Carmen resists this because she shares the goal of securing a better future for other people and doesn’t feel that compliance measures are the way to achieve this. These OD professionals must identify with something that will keep them engaged. But many have asserted that that engagement is with the people that populate organizations, not with an organization’s goals in and of themselves. The greater good that they “serve” is a sense of building social capital, but not necessarily financial capital.

For many, fear drove them out of organizations. A desire to change that experience for others drives them back into organizations. The “consultant’s role” may be a way of being in without being stuck. In a way it can be understood as a lack of commitment. All of these consultants have stories of projects gone bad. And they are relieved that they have the freedom to get out. I am not insinuating that if something gets scary in their work they will flee. Rather, although not being “on the team” might be sad in some way, they also seem relieved that they will not get pulled long-term into a set of dynamics that seem untenable and unaddressable.

As a whole, they are fairly conscious and vocal about this dynamic. When asked why he got into OD consulting, Carl, ever ready with a colorful metaphor, replies,

A severe case of a Don Quixote complex. Those aren't windmills, Sancho, those are giants out there, and we need to do some battle! I don't know if that's a victim mentality, but there is such need for organizational dialogue I think individuals are better off for having a company that wants them to succeed and the company is better off too.

Although Carl's self-deprecating humor doesn't mean that he and other OD professionals like him *don't* have a Don Quixote complex, there are windmills about in need of slaying—at least that is a generally agreed upon premise among these OD professionals. Oldenburg (1999) writes of “third places” such as “cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of a community” (family and work are first and second places). Although the OD group is lacking in one of Oldenburg's criteria for third places (it is readily available as a place but once a month), with its rotating membership it meets the rest of his criteria for the type of place that is at the heart of a community.

The point of describing or identifying third places lies not really in the act of classification so much as it does in the inherent value of third places. Oldenburg argues that third places benefit “the greater good” through the production of social capital. You may recall from Chapter 1 that Fukuyama (1994) operationalizes “social capital” as the propensity for associating with relative strangers. Thus, associating

with relative strangers produces social capital, which he says is the propensity to associate with relative strangers.

Although these OD professionals' images of the greater good may not be identical, their effort to bring it about seems shared. In this group they struggle with their definitions of the greater good and their understanding of their place and role in that. Predominantly, this means that they are involved with changing how subjects are constituted. Helen points out a potential pitfall that can turn their commitment to the greater good into an indulgence in their own personal benefits:

I think you can be intuitive and very creative and still ignore the human dynamic in a way. Because you are so far into the concept pieces that you forget the pragmatics of bringing people along and noticing the differences and dissonances and then dealing with it. It is one thing to have a very creative idea, it is another thing to implement it in such a way that supports people through the change rather than demanding they act, behave, and relate in a very different way.

Acting in the interest of the greater good is by no means mandatory (although it does seem typical) of a DOD practitioner. However, Helen also observes that people often benefit personally (beyond the obvious monetary compensation) from their work as well.

Personal Benefits

In addition to the benefits that accrue to people and society in general, interviewees were unanimous in articulating personal benefits they get from the work that they do to mitigate alienation. Likewise, many of the other participants in the

group sessions mentioned personal benefit as a reason they do the work they do. These benefits generally involve a reduction in alienation for the consultant.

When asked how she got started, Felicity beams, “It was an accident, but I stuck with it because it gave me an opportunity to do something different all the time.” A boss had asked her to take over a leadership development program when the company’s consultant was abruptly fired. She muddled through it but loved the fact that she was on her own with so many people doing so many different things at different times. She instantly recognized the value of the novelty in this work in comparison to her previous administrative position. After developing her talents in OD, she left the company and began consulting. She makes a list of things she loves about the lifestyle: independence, learning, ever changing challenges, flexibility. Helen echoes this, “How I got started: It was an accident, but I stuck with it because it gave me an opportunity to do something different all the time.”

Donya has a similar story. Her entry into OD was entirely unintentional but she just clicked personally with it.

I really wanted to be a singer. But that didn’t work out. About that time I started working with [a business services company] and started realizing that I really liked it because they were helping other people to learn. And a light bulb just went on in my head and I said, “This is what I was meant to do.”

Her apparent enthusiasm about helping other people to learn ostensibly may seem to be an orientation to the greater good. However, I include it within my discussion of personal benefits because she focuses so strongly on her enjoyment of what she was

doing. She insists that her work is not that of a good Samaritan but rather is somewhat self-interested because of the gratification she experiences.

After an especially interesting interview with Helen, who had recently taken up a new career—as a hospice minister—I get a hug. She proclaims, “I have enjoyed this thoroughly. It is genuinely therapeutic, just like our work.” For Helen, OD is therapeutic. However, unlike actual therapy, the “therapist,” or in this case, the consultant, is benefiting therapeutically from it.⁸ In her case, however, I get the impression that it is a primary reason for doing OD (and now hospice ministering), not just a theoretic fact or pleasant side effect, as much of the literature on this phenomenon in therapy presents it. Helen, who was a nurse before she was an OD consultant, reflects on the central theme of all of her work, “I think I would like to work in a hospice more formally to influence it more structurally from an ethical and spiritual perspective in terms of how we come to make decisions about end of life issues and how we support each other. I can say this as a chaplain, as a nurse, or an OD specialist.” It is clear to me in talking with her that, whatever role she assumes, Helen *does* this stuff. Doing DOD work actually depends on her being her “left-brained” self, and she unapologetically takes that with her wherever she goes.

One apparent reason these DOD consultants do this work is because they can be fully themselves while doing it. Janice observes, “The reason I do [OD] is because it is engaged. When I am working there is no part of me that is not engaged—my

⁸ Some therapists also admit to receiving benefits (e.g., Andersen, 1995; Rogers, 1987).

passion, my intellect . . .” Much other work is antagonistic to their values and identities, but DOD privileges their values and identities. Angelique is up front about how much of this work is about her:

Part of what I had to do in the process of becoming an OD professional was to develop compassion about myself. The more I developed compassion about myself, the more I developed compassion toward others. I have realized that my OD work was an entrée for developing myself. I have learned that we all put people on pedestals but that none of us really have our shit together. We all project very well. I really believe that the people I work with never feel judged. People don't get *met* generally. When you can meet somebody at a deep level, it is a transformative experience for them. And when you can do that with some kind of unconditional positive regard for them that they can feel its like When I think to the times when I have met people who really met me, those are rare and fleeting and profound in their impact on me.

Ironically, this personal benefit is in line with the work they do. DOD involves the facilitation of alternative subjectivities, and this requires special attention and work on the practitioner's own subjectivity. Carmen observes, “when I discovered OD it was like all of the paths in my life came together—being a change agent, doing the personal work, the ‘bumping up against yourself,’ and I was consequently good at it.” The demand is also the reward. The very capacity that DOD work requires of a skillful practitioner is a reward (to the practitioner) in and of itself.

Many of these DOD practitioners seem to relish their roles and identities as mavericks, rebels, or radicals. Janice loves to think of herself as “perturbing,” George's narrations seem almost evangelical, and Carl uses metaphors like “tearing the lid off” and bringing “dis-ease” to the organization. Although no one in the group

would accuse them of bravado, it is quite clear that they express these elements of their existence most strongly and clearly among other DOD practitioners (and this group is a primary gathering place for DOD practitioners).

They also seem to take it as a reward when the people they work with come to appreciate and endorse their way of doing things (and endorse them by proxy, of course). Angelique was especially excited about a bank with which she had been working lately:

There is something about this company where there has been a big emphasis on personal growth and development and heart. I am struck by . . . the willingness of the organization to really build the internal capacities of their people. There is a partnership between external consultants and internal folks, not just internal consultants either. Even though this organization often works with consultants as “pair-of-hands” or expert, it’s not doing that in this context. Not only at the CEO level but senior leaders as well there is a heartfelt sincerity about the importance of this change which is communicated by them and modeled by them. These guys, who are making bazillions of dollars and are, by and large, white men, are willing to be vulnerable, are willing to say they don’t know everything, are willing to get feedback from people who are subordinate to them about their behavior.

The satisfaction and appreciation apparently doesn’t come from having “changed” someone, some group, or an organization. Angelique readily admits that this vulnerability began before she arrived on the scene. Rather, Angelique seems to take the existence of such an organization as an endorsement of her values, her very existence. One of the greatest personal benefits that I found these consultants to enjoy is the affirmation of who they are in a world that generally regards them as other. Their aspirations and ambitions seem to demonstrate this as well. Donya reflects on how she has, “dreamt for years of writing a book about that. You know,

what really happens in an interaction with a subordinate or a supervisor when you are really present. I am so clear about how much gets censored out and how much organizations lose as a result.”

The final identity issue with which the participants deal is fear. The pressures of committing one’s self, balancing various demands, and managing one’s motives can make self-participation frightening—for themselves and their clients.

Fear

Although optimism and hope prevail among these consultants, it may also be true to say that their work is fundamentally fearful. In fact, fear seems to be a nearly universal consequence of doing this sort of work. Mitigating alienation seems to put OD consultants in scary positions. There are two different kinds of fear that may arise from this kind of work. First, the precarious position of an “outside” consultant, or even an “inside” consultant who uses metaphors like “tearing the roof off” and other connotations of disruption to describe his or her work creates fears about financial security. Second, doing this kind of work creates existential fears that stem from metacommunicating and doing things in non-customary ways.

Janice is a single woman. She admits, “I am in a precarious position. I have had people—single women especially—say to me ‘I would never do what you’re doing’ because its fine if you are married to somebody with benefits and a steady paycheck and this is sort of a side thing.”

When the three founders are asked about why they created the OD SIG, they respond by saying that they needed a community—a support system. As independent consultants, their work relationships are brief and temporary in most cases. OD consulting is also often a solo venture. They don't have a community of professional peers when they work solo. Their idea of support is not only “technical” support but the kind of “identity support” offered to George when he narrates what he calls the “shenanigans” that go on at his workplace.

Fear is not only a condition of their work, but an object of it, too. Donya is concerned that fear is a basic value in many organizations:

I have met very few great leaders. I have met very few people who as a rule operate from an open stance. There are times when they do, but I haven't met many who do so consistently. What I see in addition to these moments of extraordinary leadership and openness and whole-person stuff and all of that is that there is incredible fear and incredible pain. That is what is motivating me to start to do some work with healing around all of that. People in organizations are, in my experience, by and large, really oppressed. Really oppressed. You know, the cog in the wheel to get the job done is the norm.

With a little prompting, Donya acknowledges that she has struggled with this same kind of fear and difficulty with openness. She also acknowledges that the type of dynamic that she is describing has touched her. Indeed, it is even one of the reasons she is an independent consultant. She says she likes working based on a contract and views it as a way of protecting herself from the disappointments she is describing above. When I ask if there is an incongruity between protecting herself (with a consultant relationship) and promoting openness and willingness to deal with pain, she offers a distinction. She says that she is protecting herself from the organization

only and that she is very vulnerable and open in her relationships with the people in the organization with whom she is assigned to work.

Helen mirrors Donya's point when she says, of her entire life, "I have always been not on the cutting edge but on the bleeding edge. . . ." She is not trying to evoke sympathy. Rather, she is focusing on what brought her to what she sees inescapably as a helping profession. Nurse, OD practitioner, and hospice minister, she says, are all the same job in a different part of the same system.

Donya identifies the core of DOD work as listening and argues that it is fundamentally scary:

I think the key to the business [OD], and it is scary, is listening. If you are a damned fine listener, listen for the subtleties, the things you do hear and don't hear That is when I feel like I am doing my best, when I am listening and reflecting back to them Sometimes it's scary to listen like that and tell the truth about what you are hearing.

She finds that listening requires her sometimes to tell people what they don't want to hear. Further, she says it requires her to act in ways that are not congruent with social and cultural norms of business. She knows that she will open herself up to criticism or worse when she is sympathetic, supportive, or long-sighted. She admits that, although she can divest from her work emotionally, it is still hard sometimes to discount people's comments about her work when the values it embodies are so dear.

Carl puts a positive spin on the fear, "I think that is why I love OD. It's exciting and it's disquieting. By virtue of approaching things with an OD frame of

reference you are playing with dis-ease.” Janice offers a similar spin with laughter, “My job is to perturb the system. To be perturbing!”

There is also concern sometimes about the effects of “tearing the lid off” of traditional organizational patterns. Carmen is concerned that sometimes she is “just setting [employees] up for the kill.” She is breaking them of their fear-induced self-protective behaviors and, potentially, making them targets. Tom is concerned that “tearing the lid off” may have consequences that are quite contrary to the organization’s reason for bringing him in. He has run into people who have told him, “because of you I changed jobs.” He admits that his clients don’t pay him to convince people to leave the company. He charges through the laughter that this elicits to declare that it was not his intent either. But, he argues, exposure to challenges to the status quo may result in someone being awakened to the possibility of something different and that something different may not include their current employment situation. Once the laughter subsides, I interject that, despite the fact that the client may fail to see it, this may be the best thing for the client as well.

Carmen carries the “setting them up for the kill” metaphor one step further and tells about a documentary she saw where an animal behavior researcher insinuated himself into an Alaskan white wolf population to study them. Only when it was too late did he realize that he had broken down their wariness of humans. Eventually he had little left to study. These OD professionals often joke that they,

along with therapists, have one of the few jobs where your success leads to unemployment. But this sort of “mortality” is not the motive behind this joke.

Helen, however, offers an interesting counterpoint to this perspective on fear:

I think I am at my worst when I try to control the outcome according to my values and beliefs. And I am at my best when I focus the least amount of energy on it and am open to the process. It may look like a failure at the moment of departure because people are at dis-ease or dissonance or they didn't move forward as I had hoped. In consulting with YYY mental health hospital where the “hospital” was interfering with the “mental health” side of things, it eventually got so bad that the hospital closed. But is that negative? That is where the process of life is greater than the snapshot in time. I am now doing a project at XXX hospital. And the CFO is the same nifty woman who contracted me eight years earlier. It has been very neat re-connecting with this woman, who I left in great dissonance when I left YYY, and tells me so clearly how she grew and made changes as a result of the experience. Because of my style, I might have pushed people to get clean and clear, which didn't help YYY stay together because I clarified for them part of the basic underlying differences and dis-ease. So it is rewarding to see her so engaged and not regretful of that experience. In fact, we are going to do lunch and call the former CEO of YYY who is now in D.C. and doing very well next week. So, it did not go down in my book as a success at the time, but . . . all that happened [at YYY] happened six months to a year later [after my consultation] so who am I in that grand scheme of things?

From Helen's perspective, a lot of fear is driven by a desire to control outcomes.

Fear is balanced in many different contexts. It may be necessary to balance a fundamental economical fear with the lifestyle (and income pattern) of being a consultant, as Janice does. It may also be necessary, as Carl points out, to goad people out of the protective behaviors associated with fear, and sometimes also is necessary to “put the lid back on” and avoid going too far. The work of these DOD consultants seems to require an ability to balance delicately risk and fear for themselves and for those with whom they work. This may seem like a statement that

could apply to anyone. However, for most people, balancing risk and fear is something they do while working (and doing a whole lot of other activities). For these DOD consultants, balancing risk and fear *is* part and parcel of their work.

Conclusion

These six themes bring life to the polarity presented in Chapter 2 between the critics of OD who charge complicity with and extension of the structures of alienation and the proponents of OD that see it as a way out of these same structures and relationships. The possibility of dialogue and participation in the production of one's self are the central issues of this debate. In my group and individual conversations, I attempted to create a dialogue about these central issues. The results of this dialogue are the six themes presented above.

The first theme, "A Shared Value for Dialogue" ties these consultants, who generally do very different types of consulting, together. The second theme, "People Who *Do* This Stuff" distinguishes OD practitioners who are committed to the actual participants in their efforts, and not just the organization's interests. The third theme, "Inside and Outside," focuses on the literal and figurative positioning that these consultants do in order to be someone who does this work. The fourth and fifth themes, "The Greater Good" and "Personal Benefits" bring together two categories from Oldenburg (1999) to indicate the dual motivations to the work of these consultants. Finally, the sixth theme, "Fear," is an essential circumstance of this orientation against alienation.

These DOD professionals create this group by their participation in it. Interestingly, it has many of the characteristics that they want to bring about in organizations. In this way, it can be seen as an incubator or perhaps a sanctuary—a place to practice walking the walk—a place to take refuge from organizational realities of the world in which they were born by surrounding themselves with organizational realities that they desire to participate in.

In this sense the OD SIG is almost a surreal setting. But it is a setting that enables its participants to do what they do. It enables them not only to perform the technical requirements of their work, but also to be whom they need to be to do their work. The identity demands of occupation have certainly been written about before (Kanter, 1977; Kondo, 1990). However, these DOD professionals are unique in that the demands their work places on their identities is the same as their work itself. In this sense, the work of DOD demands that one *be* one's work.

In the next chapter, I discuss the prospects of dialogue and DOD for mitigating alienation and participating in the ongoing transition from modernism. I do this by considering the theoretical and practical implications of the current chapter.

CHAPTER 6

DIALOGUE AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed an emerging trend in the OD literature that identifies dialogue as a way of undoing the ravages to identity caused by modernism. In Chapter 5, I elaborated on this issue by discussing certain themes that emerged from my observations, group conversations, and interviews with OD professionals. This focus on identity by DOD practitioners in particular has two important aspects. First, DOD practitioners are themselves uniquely constituted individuals. They may not be wholly postmodern, but they are not wholly modern subjects either. As I stated in Chapter 1, we are still very much in a transition, and it would probably be impossible for any subject to be wholly postmodern when modern relations still prevail. Second, DOD practitioners must necessarily be somewhat postmodern subjects in order to do DOD work effectively.

In this chapter, I first examine the implications of these aspects of the focus on subjectivity and identity for theories of dialogue, especially as they pertain to alienation, modernism, and postmodernism. Next, I discuss the consequences of these implications for DOD practice. Finally, I reflect on the relevance of first person, dialogic research methods for DOD practice.

Dialogue, Alienation, and Things

Baudrillard (1984) argued that modernism makes things out of processes. Heidegger (1962) emphasized that “thinging” imparts a quality of “always already

present.” Things that are always already present do not have to be produced; others have produced them for us. In an industrial society, then, not only are things available on demand, but also so are identities. Alienation from our identities occurs when our identities are produced as things that are readily available for our consumption. It is alienating to find one’s self pre-packaged and readily available for one’s own consumption. One’s participation is real, but limited to one’s creative combinations of components and “re-interpretations,” such as participating in the brief rebirth of the disco fad that came and went in the late 1990s. Thus the “advantage” of monetary resources for purchasing pre-packaged components is really only a greater propensity for alienation.

Each generation now invents a supposedly “new” music style, more outrageous fashion, and more profound “angst” than the preceding one. Likewise, management fads can become the markers of “hip” identity (Zorn et al., 2000). “We are so ‘not you’” is the underlying message in all of this. But we are still we, not I. Monetary resources can be thought of as a relative disadvantage as well. One is much more likely to be an “I” when one produces his or her own identity rather than when cobbling one together from purchasable totems and symbols. The industrial revolution made exchange systems the norm and took the individual work out of producing things. Instead, we now purchase things and, in so doing, we purchase our selves as well. We take our purchased selves with us wherever we go, including to work. Indeed, our work is not just the means to the resources of identity acquisition;

it is also an identity “purchase” that we make with our labor (Gergen, 1991, Zorn et al., 2000).

This kind of pastiche identity is entirely inorganic and rooted in social processes that bypass the dialogic processes that are the foundation of human interaction (Bakhtin, 1986). Gergen (1991) states that “social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self” (p. 6). When Carmen resists a request to write a dress code (see Chapter 5), she is resisting participation in pastiche identities. First, a dress code promotes “we”; it promotes a prepackaged identity element that invites adoption, but not participation. Second, the dress code sidesteps the organic process of identity in human interaction that *could* take place if one person tried to deal directly with another regarding his or her attire. Instead, the process of meeting, which includes the *possibility* of the complainant’s perception and perspective on the offending attire being changed, is sidestepped and a control mechanism is invoked so that this human meeting can be avoided. When this human meeting is avoided, a contribution to a language of the self (in relation to other[s]) is made. But it is a random contribution, unrelated to others, and, thus, incoherent in that it may refer to nothing beyond itself. Carmen’s idea of “checking out” avoids the dichotomy between the “good employee” and constructing an identity independent of the organization. Further, with her particular professional niche, she could be called on not only to be the “good employee” but also to help create techniques for constructing other “good employees.” In other words, she is “checking

out” not only from being constituted as a subject by this system, but also checking out from being a “tool” in this system for so constituting others.

The act of “checking out,” as Carmen coined it, for DOD practitioners is, if not an open rebellion against modern subjectivity, at least a conscious choice to become a participant in the work of producing one’s self. There are an endless number of ways of participating, but “checking out” is one way of becoming more of a participant for DOD practitioners. Once “out,” there also are a myriad of choices for the individual DOD consultant. These choices involve how they relate to the variety of stakeholders in any given situation. The existence of the OD SIG itself may be the closest thing to an “ideal world” for the OD practitioners in this sense, although the commonality of the pursuit of participation is certainly not perfectly realized.

Modernist Hangover

The DOD consultant who doesn’t want to help with a dress code does not want to help with the construction of a “we” at the workplace. Thinking and being in terms of “we” rather than “I” may sound like a wonderful beginning place for an ethical community built on dialogue, especially in light of recent corporate scandals. Reports of a greedy CEO cheating thousands of people out of millions of dollars—bankrupting people so he or she can buy a condo at a ski resort—abound in the news recently. Unfortunately, “we” is neither the starting place of an ethical community built on dialogue nor the end of alienation. In “we” there is always pressure for closure. “We” must seal the ranks to prevent leakage; “we” don’t want to become

“them.” “I” is necessarily leakage, because when “I” am being “I,” “we” are no longer “we.” How can you know who you are if you are not one of “us”? How can I know who I am if I am not part of a “we”? Thus, the monologic pressure to resume being like “us” kicks in. The leakage must be stopped, so “I” must be resolved into “us” or “them.” If you are not with us, you are against us. And “we” is always isolated from “other” by the very virtue of it being “we.” “We” always requires “they”; resulting in “us” and “them.” This presumes the need always to distinguish between “us” and “them,” which is always monologic because you must be like “us” in some critical way, or you are like “them,” and with “them” share the critical characteristic of not being like “us.”

Despite media’s predisposition toward singling out individuals or small groups for scapegoating, recent corporate scandals have been perpetrated not just by a few greedy mavericks. In fact, our appetite for this kind of demonization is a type of “we” building. We share our indignation toward the greedy mavericks because we are not like them by virtue of our not being greedy, and, most importantly, not being rich. However, a few greedy mavericks are not the problem. Rather, there is an elaborate system of “we” building at play. Law schools, business schools, clubs and organizations, and media portrayals all create class distinctions whereby the “elite” are known from the not so elite, who are known from the not elite at all, who are known from the worst elements of society. A sense of entitlement follows because, after all, I am not cheating my friends (the rest of “we”), just those other people

(“them”). People become always already present things in the “weing” and “theying” that are part and parcel of modern relations.

In this sense, a critic of modernism in any of its myriad forms may be thoroughly modern in his or her way of thinking, relating, and forming identities. Indeed, if this critic’s definition of “critic” centralizes “critical of” and if his or her primary activity is “criticism of,” this critic may be the dialectical partner of modernism. He or she may reify modernism not only through the particulars of the critique, but by behaving in a thoroughly modern way. By decreasing uniqueness, modernism privileges the formation of “we” and the performance of acts that draw closure around “we.” Thus, mass protests may be viewed as high modernism because the act itself is the closure that identifies “us” and “them.”

Uniqueness, “I”, does not exist when many of the components of identity must be purchased (whether with currency or not) from a generic, ready-made stock. When elements of identity are “off the shelf,” we lose the presumption of uniqueness, are predisposed to perceiving commonalities, and tend to ignore the subtleties that may suggest otherwise. Grouping according to characteristics supercedes and suppresses recognition of uniqueness. Thus, a critic of modernism may recognize another critic because she or he articulates the same criticisms. Ironically, from this perspective, a pony-tailed, Birkenstock wearing, critical business professor, sporting the bully pulpit of tenured professorship and a copy of Marx’s *Capital*, may be much more a part of what he or she critiques than one of the DOD consultants interviewed in this study. This fictitious professor may be said to have a hangover caused by

modernism. The professor can see that the party has ended but can still have a headache and the shakes to show for his or her indulgence in the ways of modernism.

The DOD consultant is a participant in a 12-step program: Modernists Anonymous.

There is no meeting of “me” and “you” (or “I and Thou” in Buber’s terms) when “we” is around. Thus, “we” is never a ground for dialogue. This is the key way that modernism works against dialogue. When the components of identity are always already present and “weness” abounds, dialogue cannot find an “I” and a “Thou” with which to work. Interestingly, the members of the OD SIG share a very powerful communal bond. And they use the pronoun “we” without irony. However, “we” does not block their openness as frequently as it may for others. They acknowledge a commonality without enforcing closure. Chapter 5 shows many ways in which they embrace, in words and deeds, the uniqueness among them.

“We,” in modern work life, is a subtle entity built on such things as strong corporate identities, corporate wellness plans, and “casual overtime.” As with any “we,” there are efforts to differentiate. Saturn, for example, differentiates “us” (Saturn) from “them” (other automobile/heavy industry) with claims and manifestations of (relative) egalitarianism, and Southwest Airlines differentiates us (empowered, employee owned) from “them” (hierarchical, shareholder owned) by means of a “fun” atmosphere. However, this is just a parsing of “we’s.”

The experience of one’s self as always already present is alienating. It stands to reason, then, that if OD professionals are in many ways working dialogically against alienation, they will be preoccupied sometimes with their own identities and

participation in the work of producing them. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 5, this self-participation is a prelude to facilitating self-participation in others.

Participation in the work of producing one's self is at the center of working on postmodernism and is often at the center of consciousness for many of the OD professionals whom I have studied. It is always at the center of the work that I have labeled "DOD."

Working on Postmodernism Revisited: Potential for Change

Those critics, reviewed in Chapter 2, who argue, for example, that contemporary OD trends constitute unreflective management fashions (Zorn et al., 1999), further corporate colonization of employees' lives (Cox, 1999; Grugulis, 1999; Hatcher, 1999), or conflate organizational goals with employees' goals (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992; Fincham & Clark, 2001) are focusing on structural elements of relationships. Their critiques seem accurate and well supported. The consultants who participated in this research, however, tend to focus more on actual interactions they have experienced or would like to experience. This focus leaves them somewhat more optimistic and enthusiastic (like the DOD literature) than the critics.

I find, when I am reading those critics or writing about them, that I tend to agree with them and share their concern that DOD could further dominate people's lives and alienate them from themselves. I also find, when I listen to tapes or read transcripts of my participants, that I tend to agree with them and share their enthusiasm for the future. Doing this project has allowed me to synthesize and

integrate these perspectives. Who is right? I clearly understand and appreciate the rationality of both. And neither perspective shall get the last word.

I am fortunate to have been able to take this stereoscopic look at what at first seem to be opposites. But in their opposition, I have found dialogue. I can put the two in dialogue with each other in my perception, thinking, and, to some degree, writing. However, the question remains, what about them, the participants and the critics? Because I have participated in the OD SIG for three years, these OD consultants are clearly a more real entity to me than the critics. I have taken my developing results, including the criticisms from the literature, back to them as a group on a couple of occasions and discussed my findings, sometimes at length, one-on-one with various participants many times. I have found them almost always to be intensely interested in these critiques. They grapple with the ideas and try to apply them and appreciate them. I don't interpret this necessarily as agreement, but as engagement. In this sense, their narratives have coherence. They argue for structures and processes that they themselves emulate and promote. Thus, they have characterological coherence (Fisher, 1987).

On the other hand, the critics are a bit more abstract of an entity to me despite the fact that I have had some direct contact with some of them as well. I presented a paper on the optimism expressed in the OD SIG at an organizational theory panel at the annual conference of the International Association of Business Disciplines (Kreisher, 2001a, 2001b). The panel was organized by the Critical Management Studies Workshop of the Academy of Management. It was at previous conferences

dedicated exclusively to critical studies in management that many of the “pessimistic” papers cited in Chapter 2 were first presented. In fact, one of the authors cited in Chapter 2 was in attendance at my session and the respondent was also an author I cited in that chapter. The OD SIG’s optimism, and my apparently implicit endorsement of it, was dismissed as naïve and simplistic. The audience, the other panelists, and the respondent did not seem to be interested in perspectives different from their own. Not only were they not convinced, they were not even engaged.

I have argued that many of the DOD consultants in this study are oriented toward dialogue, regardless of their exact OD “specialty.” Consistent with this, I have found them often to behave in a dialogic manner and to build dialogic structures, if such can be said to exist. Chapter 5 described many of the ways in which they struggle not only to be dialogic, but also to facilitate dialogic processes and build dialogic structures.

I can only conclude that much of the “critical” perspective (the “pessimistic” voice as I labeled it in Chapter 2) still operates in inherently modernist ways. The critics intend for their critique to contradict, oppose, and replace the dominant management ethic. Indeed, by the end of my session at the management conference, it was clear that I was regarded as a well-intentioned fool at best. After the panel concluded, I was barraged with patient explanations for why there was no reason for optimism and recommendations that “you should read this paper that I [or my friend] wrote, which covers why all of that is wrong.” On two occasions, they referred me to papers that I cited (and discussed in the presentation).

From their own perspective, which I readily adopt, it is hard to disagree with the critics. But it is their style of interaction with the world that convinces me of the validity of their perspective, not their ideology. They interact with their world, and the people in it, as objects or things. Given this, there is in fact good reason for them to believe that alienation cannot be transcended under current social realities. They know. They have tried. They have seen that more than 100 years of lecturing, demonstrating, protesting, and revolting have not changed it. They don't believe in the ability of individual human agents to "work on postmodernism." This is an extreme sort of alienation. Some of them have resorted to ideology as their ultimate weapon against the "outside" forces that threaten them. In doing so, they have armed themselves with a modernist weapon of mass destruction—one that has removed all voices, all partitioning of voices, has carved out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, and crammed everything into one abstract consciousness, to echo Bakhtin (1986, p. 147). In this sense, their narratives lack coherence. They argue for the elimination of structures and processes which they perpetuate in the mode of their arguments. Thus, characterological coherence (Fisher, 1987) eludes them.

At the end of my conference session, I was approached as a category—a fool or interloper. Based on that assessment, I was lectured accordingly about my naïveté. On the other hand, the DOD consultants neither accepted nor rejected my explanations of the critics' arguments. Instead, they inquired and they tried to understand. The arguments of the critics, if accepted, essentially invalidate the work

the DOD consultants do. If a DOD consultant were to accept these arguments fully, he or she would have to find new careers. Likewise, if the critics were to accept the possibilities inherent in the DOD practitioners' perspectives, he or she too would have to find a new career (or at least radically refashion his or her current ideology). However, the DOD consultants saw uniqueness and value in these perspectives about their own work, even though they identify with the work greatly, as we have seen.

I am not trying to make a moral distinction here. I am not arguing that the DOD consultants are better because they were open to difference and the critics were not. I am trying to make a practical distinction. Now that I have returned to the question of the potential for "working on postmodernism," that I proposed in Chapter 1, we see that the DOD consultants' way of being has potential for working on postmodernism whereas the critics' way of being contains no way of working on postmodernism⁹.

Structural constraints are real but these DOD consultants' awareness of the structures of modernism (although they may not use this language) indicates that social structures are not necessarily all constraining. That is not to say that the DOD consultants can act outside of social structures, but that acting with an awareness of those social structures, and one's potential and actual responses to them, opens up the possibility of difference.

⁹ This is true to the degree that we can make them archetypes, which suffices only for illustration and offers no predictive power about an individual consultant or critic.

One must have a temporally restricted notion of social structures to appreciate this. You must regard a social structure as something that is created in the here and now by actual social actions rather than as an abstraction that can be articulated separately. Thus, when DOD consultants “check out” in order to relate differently to an organization or to individuals, they may be acting in a postmodern way, which inherently indicates a postmodern social structure, at least in potential.

Marx’s analysis emphasized structures of domination. Those who adopted Marx politically¹⁰ may advocate revolution against domination. These revolutions may employ methods of domination in an effort to reverse domination. Where they are successful, they only change the players in the acts, but not the alienating nature of the acts themselves.

The DOD consultants in this study frequently mentioned structures of domination and exploitation (such as Carl’s fish analogy in Chapter 5). However, they see themselves as offering alternatives rather than shouting at others to change. In the next section, I examine some of the practical issues DOD consultants deal with in order to facilitate change.

Dialogue, Alienation, and OD Work

Janice highlighted an issue of existential angst and alienation that is often overlooked in analyses of subjectivity. The alienation of modernism (especially as realized in work) described in Chapter 1 creates subjects devoid of centers. However,

¹⁰ Or those who adopted other revolutionary figures and movements, regardless of whether we are talking about V.I. Lenin or a business school professor of “alternative accounting.”

Carmen, for example, “checks out” and becomes marginal to the system of determination. This creates a great existential fear about one’s capacities, one’s place, and more. Thus, modernism and “checking out,” taken to extremes, can lead to an unnerving and unpleasant crisis of identity. This is salient not only for the consultant’s own identity management, but for the process of introducing processes of identity participation into various workplaces and communities. If a consultant misjudges along the way and drags somebody down into the depths of identity participation, alienation may still be the result. Ellen’s story about the director of the mental health hospital is a perfect example. Her intervention may have led to dissolution of the facility because key people questioned work and even career choices. They lost their direction and their desire.

These DOD consultants spend a lot of their time trying to manage a controlled implosion of systems of determination for themselves and others. The change they seek to facilitate, as discussed in Chapter 2, can be described roughly as a change to dialogic processes. Bateson (1979) argues that change can take place only when the perceived difference is not so great as to seem completely different altogether. In other words, there must be a perceived thematic quality shared by the “base” and the difference such that they seem to be two different expressions of the same thing or two alternatives to the same choice. “Base” in this sense refers to a point of reference rather than something that can legitimately be called the “base” in the sense of being a stable starting point. The “base” itself exists only as the realization of a difference that makes a difference (Bateson, 1979).

To illustrate how a difference cannot be too different (for change to occur), consider a person faced with the dilemma of knowing about an affair happening at work. He or she is inclined to say nothing because it seems it is irrelevant to him or her personally. However, a friend with whom this person discussed the problem argues for saying something because of the potential harm to the workplace or the respective families. This seems like two sides of the same coin. This is a change with potential, although the exact propensity of the change can never be predicted. However, choosing between saying nothing or else calling the respective spouses and telling them of the affair may not seem close enough to this person's proclivities to be "dialogueable."

From Bateson's concept we can make the leap to dialogue. A difference that seems too great may lead to dialectic. When one encounters this sort of difference one may behave dialectically. This is the way of relating that Buber (1970) called I-It. The individual(s) associated with the difference may be demonized, harangued, caricatured, and so on. These are all actions that polarize and reinforce the perceived chasm of difference. These choices become clear-cut either/or decisions. One reasons, "I wouldn't want to be like that, so I must be as I am now." One knows oneself by what one is not. This could be called a "default" identity.

A difference that is perceived as similar but different is dialogic or a dialogue waiting to happen (which is not to assume that it will). When one encounters this sort of difference, one may behave dialogically. This is the way of relating that Buber (1970) called I-Thou. The individual in this case need not be intimate friends but

probably must regard each other initially with openness and at least an absence of disrespect. Parties engaged in this way may end up someplace entirely different from where each started.

The perception of difference, but not too much, is necessary (although not sufficient) for change (and dialogue). Bateson's "change" is equivalent to learning in the context of DOD, at least the learning that the DOD practitioners seek for themselves. For change to happen, the added "ingredient" to this necessary condition is a dialogic process. I may be oversimplifying this situation a bit because, of course, dialogic processes may transform a dialectic difference (a perception of "too much" difference) into a dialogic one (a perception of reasonable difference). Likewise, a dialogic difference may not necessarily lead to dialogue. Difference itself, regardless of which type, is not a thing at all, but part of a separate, but clearly related process.

Alienation and the DOD Practitioner

We are socially and culturally at a moment of choice, as I argued in Chapter 1; we are no longer entirely modern, yet we are nowhere close to being fully postmodern. By most accounts, the alienating relationships of modernism still prevail. Yet there are clearly many individuals, like some of this study's participants, who live alternative subjectivities (at least some of the time). Alternative subjectivities may refer to DOD practitioners, various "drop-out" groups, or individuals living a life in the mainstream of modernism who sometimes find themselves in sync with their own subjectivity.

In this context, these DOD consultants grapple with Bateson's point regularly. Will this difference (this very moment) be dialectic or dialogic? The propensity of modernism is toward dialectic. So the DOD consultants deal not only with the challenge of living as organically constituted subjects themselves, but also with the challenge of trying to bring this difference to others. Simultaneously, they seek to bring this difference to the basic circumstances of work and society. Then, they must bring it to others and to the fabric of work and society and do so in such a way as not to seem too different. It has to seem dialoguable. This begs all sorts of questions such as who, what, when, where, and how. Clearly some differences are going to be too alien for dialogue. Other encounters might seem to involve "preaching to the choir." Still others may have the possibility of transformation, dialogue, and change. Some conclusions can be drawn from this study about how those encounters can be approached to optimize opportunities for dialogue, and generally take advantage of the special conditions of subjectivity that apply to DOD work and consultants.

How Can DOD Consultants Recognize Dialoguable Situations?

Many DOD consultants in this study already know how to recognize dialoguable situations. They mostly eschew a traditional "talking head" training role. They also may decline work if they believe that the decision maker is disingenuous¹¹ or that it just not a good fit or, even, if it just "doesn't feel right." To this end, many have learned, sometimes through painful trial and error, to include an "assessment" in

¹¹ A common complaint is that a decision maker may engage a DOD consultant to create the image of progressiveness, trendiness, or simply compliance with corporate training and development mandates.

a contract. Assessments are by no means revolutionary, and are a recommended part of many consulting manuals (e.g., Block, 1981). However, an assessment, performed by the most dialogue-attuned of these consultants, permits them to get a feel for the unit's dynamics of subjectivity and understand how they may or may not fit with it. Donya's observation in Chapter 5 about the scariness of listening and feeding back what she is hearing centered on the process of assessment. She uses it to observe carefully the clients' response to her engaging them in a process of self-participation.

However, generally these are lessons that are not taught in classes or books. Typically, they require on-the-job training. Thus, learning to recognize dialogueable opportunities is a valuable lesson for DOD consultants. However, these particular consultants are very experienced (ranging from 5 to 27 years). They also have the benefit of this OD SIG group, which devotes much collective effort to this rather esoteric dimension of OD work. OD training and education, where it exists, does not sufficiently acknowledge or understand the requirements that a career in OD places on subjectivity.

Importantly, there is not sufficient appreciation in the profession for the importance of dealing with the determination of subjectivity. In the OD literature, Beeby et al. (1999), Letiche and van Hattem (2000), Schor et al. (1995), Stapley (1996), and West (2001), all discussed in Chapter 3, are the exceptions rather than the rule in the attention they pay to the subjectivity of DOD consultants and their clients. An important step, then, in training consultants to make good decisions about

situations that are dialoguable and those that are not, is facilitating their understanding of their work as “identity work.”

This understanding facilitates being able to make the discrimination Bateson identified of differences that are not too different. An intuitive barometer for subjectivity is something that can be developed only by conscious attention and reflection. This presumes, first, that DOD consultants are aware of the dynamics and centrality of subjectivities and, second, that they have the proclivity to listen for these details in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of this study was that this is a persona these DOD consultants take with them everywhere, not just to work.

How Can DOD Consultants Take Advantage of Dialoguable Situations?

Certainly one recommendation for learning to take advantage of dialoguable situations is to develop and participate in groups like the OD SIG. Although the formation of this particular group is unique, the general values and abilities that produced it are not rare among DOD professionals. The OD SIG, as we saw in Chapter 5, privileges dialogic processes and certainly leads to a greater ease and propensity toward dialogue. More importantly, it gives DOD consultants experience with dialogic processes *in situ*, which cannot be substituted for by any amount or type of study.

Most importantly, like Janice’s dream of an old house filled with independent consulting practices, it is the opportunity to process, with like-minded professionals, ongoing consulting experiences. When Janice described this dream to me, I was

reminded of the “reflecting teams” described in Anderson (1997) and Boscolo et al. (1987). Reflecting teams bring a therapist from outside the therapeutic session to reflect on the events of the session and actions of the therapist. Sometimes the reflecting team works only with the therapist, but sometimes they interact with the clients as well.

The awareness of subjectivities, expressed in stories like Janice’s, is crucial for determining the dialoguability of situations, but the ability to take advantage of communication’s inherent “future orientation” (Penman, 2000, pp. 90-91) is something best learned in the process rather than in conversation “about.” The real value of OD SIG is that it is a laboratory as much as a classroom. The second Friday of every month these consultants get together to do this stuff—together.

How can DOD Consultants Transform Dialectical Opportunities into Dialoguable Opportunities?

The first answer to this question is that they cannot. As Cissna and Anderson (1998) point out, dialogue cannot be forced or made to happen. Rather, invitations can be made and groundwork laid, but ultimately, when dialogue happens, it comes quickly and as a bit of a surprise. Further, for dialogue to happen you have to be *there* at that moment. If you are strategizing about how to make it happen, usually it won’t.

This is an especially challenging question when looked at in the context of living in a transitional time between modern ways of being and postmodern ways of being. DOD consultants are often further along this transition than are their clients.

Further, DOD consultants are usually more skilled at doing the work of moving forward on this continuum than are their clients. Frequently, this can amount to behaving in a way that invites a dialogic response in the midst of dialectic. However, clearly dialectics will still happen. More importantly, dialectical opportunities and dialogable opportunities are clearly co-constructions and the DOD consultant is a participant in this construction. If a DOD consultant is to facilitate and mold a transition into postmodernism, then the consultant will have to engage dialectical opportunities as dialogic opportunities, at least where differences are not dramatic.

Donya observed in Chapter 5 that when someone is really listened to it is transformative in the sense that dialogue has occurred. When someone is really listened to, it means that his or her uniqueness and addressability (Bakhtin, 1986) has been directly acknowledged. In that moment, his or her subjectivity is one in which he or she have participated, rather than one that he or she has found or been given. For a consultant to contribute to this meeting, he or she must, at that moment, be a fully participatory subject. This clearly requires DOD consultants who are themselves self-participants.

Realizing the Potential of DOD

The questions I have discussed above all have a common theme: self-participation. What is clear is that self-participation is something that must be learned in the process of engaging in it. One can be instructed in its finer points, read discussions and analyses of it, even participate in simulations and discuss case studies. All of these would be helpful. To that end, articles such as those cited in

Chapter 3 should have a more prominent place in curricula that lead to DOD work and literatures that support this kind of study and professional practice.

However, as Farson (1978) argues, techniques cannot lead to the sorts of practices we are discussing. For him it was Rogerian psychotherapy. There is little difference in the essential nature of that and what DOD consultants are doing. Indeed, when Donya discusses the effects of “truly meeting” someone, she calls it “unconditional positive regard,” a cornerstone of Rogerian psychotherapy. Because the technicalization of dialogic practices will not get a consultant to dialogic practice (although it may occur by chance), something else is needed. For Rogerian psychotherapy, Farson argued, it was clinical work.

Organizational development is not as highly institutionalized as psychotherapy, and the segment of OD I call “dialogic” is even less so. This is not an inherent problem, however, as the participants in my study already have an answer to the question of how we can facilitate in DOD practitioners the ability to facilitate dialogue and self-participation. The OD SIG, a community of practice—for the DOD consultant, by the DOD consultant—is an excellent model for the sort of professional activity that will facilitate the abilities discussed above.

It is also important to realize that these changes that DOD consultants strive to effect are momentary, like dialogue (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). It is not possible to say that change has happened and that now it is done. As the consultants themselves attest, self-participation is something that must be achieved over and over.

Dialogic Method and DOD Practice

In Chapter 4, I identified the methodology of this study as dialogic, using a first-person perspective rather than a third-person perspective. Although I proposed this as a way of conducting academic research, it has implications for the sorts of OD practice that I have labeled “dialogic” in this dissertation.

Although some OD practice consists of responding to an already well-defined need, often consultants will be conducting some kind of assessment and evaluation of a particular problem, issue, department, or organization they have been asked to help. The most “dialogic” of these consultants nearly always insist on doing such an assessment (even when they are told there is a “well-defined” problem). They have realized what therapists have begun to realize—that the “problem” that brings the consultant or therapist into the organization or family is defined from a particular perspective. Therapists often call this the “presenting problem” (Anderson, 1997). The point of such a label is both to validate that description, and to bracket it as a necessarily partial description of the system. The dialogic methodology I proposed in Chapter 4 also recognizes the partiality of descriptions, including that of the researcher.

As I began to think of using OD SIG for my dissertation research, I did something that resembled this sort of assessment. I was, of course, informally assessing the OD SIG for the primary purpose of research, rather than intervention. Initially, I was very interested in the work that the consultants did and believed that I wanted to study their applications of theories of OD practice. This could be called the

“presenting problem” because learning about OD was what prompted me to join the group and later became my initial focus in attempting to formulate a research question. However, as I continued to get to know the individuals involved, listen to their stories, and witness the interactions among them, I realized that something much more interesting (to me) was going on. Doing consulting from an “appreciative inquiry,” “future search,” or even dialogic orientation was not really uncommon. What struck me as significant was the personal dynamics of the group and how it supported each of them—not only in their efforts to mitigate alienation, but also in their efforts to *become* the sort of person who mitigates alienation.

This transition was the result of an openness and impressionability that allowed me to find the resonance between my orientation as a researcher and these individual DOD professionals. The presenting problem was the theories of OD. Presenting problems always have a perspective (in this case my proclivity toward theories and practices of OD). But actual interaction—whether it is research or intervention (or both)—is always polyphonic. For this reason, DOD practitioners would benefit from a first person approach to DOD work as I did from a first person approach to this research.

A DOD practitioner may be predisposed toward an expert-diagnostic approach to assessment. An OD practitioner may have first encountered these prescriptions in his or her education as an OD practitioner, and they are likely to be reinforced by the invitation from the contact person(s) in the organization. The expectation that an expert should diagnose and fix the problem has to be questioned

by the practitioner, and, quite possibly, the practitioner may need to discuss these expectations directly with the contact person(s) in the organization.

As with the conventions of consulting practice for the DOD practitioner, the conventions of academic research pointed me toward a third-person perspective. I am fortunate to have been encouraged in academic exploration of first-person perspectives and have not had to metacommunicate about the assumptions underlying these conventions in order to justify my approach. Nonetheless, the task involved in justifying a first-person approach to one's committee is similar to the task involved in justifying a dialogic approach (regardless of what it may actually be called) to a client.

In addition to making the expectation of expertise a subject of conversation, the DOD practitioner might engage in the assessment dialogically. This requires the practitioner to make an epistemological choice of specific, contextualized knowledge over generalized, context-free knowledge. It also requires the practitioner to make an axiological choice to include the voices of individuals in their assessment. These two choices lead the DOD practitioner to emphasize relationships over techniques (Farson, 1978). This expands on the questions of improving dialogic practice earlier in this chapter in that engaging clients dialogically from the beginning may set the stage for dialogic opportunities rather than dialectic opportunities.

Conclusion

Above, I described how I have experienced the natural tension between the critics and the optimists of OD as a dialogue. For this dialogue to continue, it is clear

that the “critics” may be a significant obstacle. This, of course, does not implicate the specific authors (even the two from my conference session) so much as it implicates academic and non-academic researchers in general. The problem is not ideological, but practical. The culture of academia privileges dialectical modes such as I described from my conference experience. These modes have resulted in many great achievements, but they inhibit a field in making dramatic leaps or in changes or embracing diversity. Much progress has been made in communication toward making research more applied and more engaged. However, for this trend to continue, OD and communication must move beyond their well-theorized constructs and be not only engaged, but engaging.

EPILOGUE

The central task that faced me as a researcher wishing to conduct research in a first-person manner is how the methodological choices described in Chapter 4 translate into actions. How can I resist the temptation to impose “outside” language—whether it is scientific discourse, or themes suggested by prior research, or even my own biases—on the subjects in my study? How do I proceed in order to account for myself, while giving voice to my participants as well? I learned a few things about these issues through beginner’s missteps and mistakes as well as successes and luck while doing this study.

The first thing I learned is how fortunate I was to have found a dissertation topic so close to home. The traditional temptation (brought out by the languaging of academia) is to find a subject. My subject found me. To have my subject find me was serendipitous, and not something I intentionally made happen, or could make happen. Inherent in the notion of “finding” a subject is a notion of otherness and separateness. I was already “in” the group when my dissertation topic found me. I did not have to “make entry” and develop the potential for dialogically relating with most of the people who became the participants of my research. I will not argue that it would have been impossible for me to proceed with first-person research if I had found my research instead of vice versa but I do think that my research finding me made it much easier.

I was also fortunate that “in” was an easy place to get to among these people. Grubb (2001) studied this group as a community of practice, and he argued that it had no formal leadership structure and no formal hierarchy. Three people were responsible for starting it, but no one (especially them) considers them responsible for what it has become. If they (and others) lead at all, it is by example rather than by instrument. Hence, Grubb called OD SIG the epitome of a self-organizing system. This is why I emphasized in Chapter 4 that when I approached two of the founders to discuss my idea for doing dissertation research with the group that it was because I had come to respect and appreciate them and to value their opinions, and not to receive their "approval" to do this study. It didn't occur to me at the time, but I am fortunate to have had "subjects" like this (and it was more than just these two)-- people who put me so at ease and with whom I felt so comfortable that I wanted to ask them whether they thought this was a good idea. It was because of the relationship we had already established that I went to them. I credit the "first-person" qualities of my research participants with greatly facilitating the enactment of a first-person approach to this study, much more than to any ability or behavior of mine.

No matter how open and welcoming a group, a process of socialization must occur. As I pointed out in Chapter 4, I approached this group with some fear, expecting buttoned-down corporate types. When I walked in the door to my first meeting, however, I didn't find people in cliques, consumed with each other, and ignoring me. It was a bit disconcerting at first, but I was hit with a spontaneous welcome from people who seemed genuinely interested in who I was and what I was

doing there. No doubt my authorship of the article they discussed earlier and my association with my coauthor of that article, whose session two months prior had been a big hit, did not hurt my credibility. Then again, the welcome started before anyone knew who I was. By the middle of the meeting, I was agreeing to host a session on dialogue eight months in the future. I would never have predicted that I would be comfortable taking on such a role in this group so rapidly or that I would be genuinely committed to being around in eight months.. Again, I credit the participants in my research for creating and maintaining this “place.” Left to my own assumptions and attitudes, I would have been defensive and shy.

Although I watched other newcomers have similar experiences, it was not necessarily so rosy for everyone. One member, who has come to only three meetings in the three years I have attended, seemed to show up when she was seeking either an endorsement for her latest project or subcontractors to work for her. One month she was a presenter and spent most of her time talking about why one assessment instrument (for which she was a certified consultant) was much better than the alternative (freely available) assessment instrument. Nobody openly questioned her motives, but there was talk about her behind her back. Comments and sarcasm were shared with me about the inappropriateness of her instrumental motives. This is clearly not a dialogic moment in an otherwise predominantly dialogic group.

On another occasion, shortly after the OD SIG had moved from the Girl Scout Council building to an office building in the Westshore area, a new person attended, the supervisor of the long-time attendee who had secured this space for our meetings.

We were meeting in the conference room at her (and his) workplace. About 45 minutes into the meeting, the supervisor got up abruptly and walked out after. The following week, the OD SIG was looking for a new meeting place, and the long-time attendee who worked for him never returned. Members speculated (so far as I know it was only speculation) that he had disapproved of our style or purpose and revoked our permission to use the conference room and his employee's permission to attend the group during her work hours. Both of these people broke important norms pertaining to what sorts of behaviors are acceptable. Dialogic behavior is the norm that was broken, yet the response to them breaking it was not dialogic.

A central part of the task of conducting first-person research is relating to the participants and setting I was studying. This is significantly simplified when the first step is taken—beginning at home. I did not need to create a “stance” toward my subjects because I already had a relationship with them that was not based on a presumption of a “researcher” studying a “thing.” Perhaps keeping myself in an organic relationship to them might have been a simpler task than developing an organic relationship while entering the group as a researcher. Of course, it was still necessary to maintain those relationships.

I was not always successful at relating dialogically to my participants. Two of my interviews were decidedly undialogic. For example, in an hour and fifteen-minute interview, one interviewee, a training and development manager at a hospital, would not accept my invitation to dialogue. He was, in his mind, I am sure, quite helpful and cooperative. He responded to me as a seasoned veteran (which he is) helping a

relative novice (which I am). Responses to my open-ended questions, probes, reflections, and so on were repeatedly along the lines of “this is how it is done.” There was nothing unpleasant about his otherwise very brotherly (so it seemed to me) disposition. Indeed, he went on to employ me as a consultant to his company a few months later. But the dialogue failed to happen with him. Noticing this dynamic, I asked him what he saw as the value of the group to him. Interestingly, he identified social motives (similar to those that had come up in Grubb’s study and in the appreciative inquiry planning session), which are consistent with the general values of the group I have described. Perhaps because the interview took place in a conference room at his workplace it was framed more as formal and traditional. Or perhaps he simply wasn’t in a dialogic mood that day. Nonetheless, it is not clear to me how he saw himself in relation to the group. The second interviewee with whom I was not particularly successful in facilitating dialogue is discussed in more detail on page 172.

As I proceeded, there were inevitably elements of “researcher” that crept into some of my interactions in addition to the above interview. For this reason I chose from the start to be as open about my research intents as possible—while observing group meetings, facilitating conversations and of course, interviewing. I will admit that it was probably particularly easy to conduct dialogically oriented research in this group, whose purpose for existence is inquiry and whose members’ careers and personal interests are predisposed toward inquiry. In that setting, doing research in the midst of a conversation is the most natural thing there could be. Again, I credit the group with this, rather than any special research prowess on my part.

The most striking element of the “researcher” to enter into my research manifest itself in an unusual way. Typically, we think of “being studied” as a deterrent to people’s willingness to talk and open up. If anything, in this group, at least for some members, my doing research may have been an incentive to open up. Two people sought me out to offer themselves as interviewees before I made a formal request. In addition, when I did make a formal request for interviews via the email list the group maintains for announcing meetings, I received offers from two other people whom I had never met. One was Helen, the Hospice minister, who had recently left the OD profession and had not attended the group since I had begun to attend. She was, however, still on the mailing list. The other was Donya, who had recently moved to the area. A friend had submitted her email address, although she had not been to a meeting yet. She started attending meetings after our interview because, she said, our interview had inspired her and she wanted more of that kind of interaction.

This enthusiasm could be viewed two ways: either as a sincere desire to help and interest in learning and reflection or as a desire to show off for a committed audience. Consistent with Chapter 5, where I have identified both of these motives as co-existing more or less simultaneously, both of these motives are probably in play here. The most striking example of this enthusiasm is the use of a good deal of specialized terminology particular to OD as well as name-dropping. Examples of terminology include “dialogue,” “vision,” and “unconditional positive regard” and examples of name-dropping include “Senge” and “Kuhn.”

Perhaps the OD terminology functioned simply as specialized language that was shared by the members and that facilitated their talk with one another. Or, perhaps these individuals relished the opportunity to converse with someone who speaks their language. However, the use of specialized terminology, along with “name-dropping,” can be meant also to impress someone or “test” to see whether someone is one of “us.” When Donya mentioned “unconditional positive regard” (quoted in Chapter 5), she seemed to eye me inquisitively for just a moment and perhaps to be satisfied that I seemed to know what she was talking about. Whether that person is a “colleague,” a “close friend,” or a “researcher” may change the proportion of these things but, being consistent with my perspective in Chapter 5, these dynamics may all exist simultaneously. It may also be the case that these same things can be applied to me. Just because I never consciously used jargon to impress or test someone, doesn’t mean that it wasn’t happening at some level or that others didn’t perceive me that way. Performers like to perform. What separates a hack and an actor is that the hack performs for attention. An actor performs for the joy of achieving some kind of excellence, which doesn’t mean that the actor doesn’t also enjoy the attention.

Although this group made doing first-person research much easier than anyone would have a right to expect, this characteristic may present a problem for doing research as well. If, indeed, I was as accepted as a part of the group to the extent that I believe, it may have blinded me to contradictory items that may be construed as “negative” about the group or its individuals. I wrote in Chapter 5 about

how I had to be reminded that the consultants were not just brave and courageous, but also very fearful sometimes. I also had to be reminded by my committee of the significance of the less than dialogic interviews and two people who were treated as outsiders that I recounted above.

Perhaps, despite my efforts, there were other transgressions and contradictory moments that I missed. I did many things that were aimed at closing the circle of inference, such as reflecting my impressions back to the participants and facilitating dialogue about my themes. By closing the circle of inference I mean paying attention to one's assumptions and the formation of one's ideas. However, it is necessarily an incomplete and fallible process. Further, the fallibility can't be known (as I argued in Chapter 4). I can't know what I don't know.

I am reminded that I did not mention the very unpleasant experience of having one of the participants in my research die during the study, which I have not included aside from the dedication (which I wrote for the benefit of those in the OD SIG who may read this dissertation). In fact, having been reminded of it, I have chosen, beyond this mention, to treat it as personal and not as a part of my research. I do this out of a commitment to my memory of Joy. I have argued that a first-person approach seeks to be inclusive and not to circumscribe experiences. I am reminded here that, while this is true, it has limitations. Although many find therapy in writing, I cannot get over the feeling that to write about that experience in this dissertation would be an injustice to Joy, to my memory of her, and to my friends' memories of her. I believe that writing about her in this way would be an intrusion of "research"

into the lives of those who knew her. I cannot separate myself from them in order to undertake writing “about” this. On the other hand, I recently wrote and delivered a eulogy of my great aunt, who died earlier this year. Sharing my feelings, memories, and experiences, then, in a room full of people who knew and loved her, for the purpose of communally remembering and appreciating her, seemed the most natural thing in the world to me. Why not speak of Joy here and now, someone who, although her death touched me deeply, had a tiny fraction of the significance in my life that my great aunt did? I have said in this dissertation that I was an insider to the OD SIG. I have had that claim challenged and questioned vigorously and that is appropriate. I have searched my notes, my thoughts, and my gut feelings for an adequate way to answer the question, “How do you know you were an insider?” I have been unable to offer an entirely adequate answer and this has troubled me—I have questioned whether I was right about this. But now I know. I won’t give up something that touched so many of *us* so deeply. Period. It is *ours*. That isn’t very dialogic, I realize. I am circumscribing an “us.” I know myself today as an insider, in my mind and in my heart. I can’t speak for everyone else’s perception of me.

I also realize that trust plays into it. By trust, I mean existential trust—trusting that someone will not take advantage of what you say, will not use it against you, or try to use it for their own purpose. As I consider each of my committee members, who are my most immediate audience for this dissertation, I realize I would talk very differently with each of them if they were to ask me, face to face, about Joy’s death. My relationship with each is different. I may reflect intellectually, share my feelings,

or simply change the subject, depending on to whom I might be speaking. And I can't anticipate other future readers of this work. Who are they? Can I trust them? Without a doubt, these sorts of perceptions and issues of trust will have played a part for my participants in their dealings with me also. Was I trusted?

I have described in Chapters 4 and 5 how I have engaged my subjects in the development of the themes presented in Chapter 5, reflected on the comments of others with interviewees and also in casual conversations. However, this only partially accounts for how my research reentered the lives of my participants. I quoted Helen in Chapter 5 as saying that she found our interview “therapeutic, like our work.” She began her career as a nurse. She ended up doing training and development at the hospital at which she worked. When I met her, she had recently finished her training to become a hospice minister and was just a few weeks into the job. It seems she found the conversation therapeutic in general because she spent much of the 2 hours (my longest interview) reflecting on her life path and values and commitments. However, this seemed to culminate in a revelation that all of her careers were the same. It occurred to her that she really had had only one career. She said that she had always seen herself as the “left brain” in those settings—whether in relation to doctors, administrators, or the families of dying people. She had always facilitated intuitive, emotional responses. She recognized continuity in all three careers that made her very happy. Although it never seemed to me that she had much doubted her decision to become a hospice nurse, I believe, my research re-entered her life in a way that affirmed her decision to her. I was surprised that when the

interview ended I hugged her spontaneously and without consideration. I, too, enjoyed, and found the conversation therapeutic. It was therapeutic to me simply because it engaged me as a total person.

I also believe that my research didn't re-enter the life of at least two of my participants in the way I had hoped (to them at least). One of my interviewees was the woman mentioned above who came to the group only to seek support or help in her latest project. She spent much of the interview bragging about the big clients she had had and their big offices in Dallas and Boston, etc. And she lectured me about Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995) without asking me what I did or did not already know about it. In her case, it doesn't seem that my research re-entered her life in a significant way, or at least not in a form remotely like what I would have liked. She did go out of her way to meet with me, and I would imagine she felt some satisfaction at having helped me out. Similarly, I believe the training manager saw himself as helping out a younger professional not only in granting the interview, but in employing me as a consultant. I desired for my work to reenter their lives as a dialogic opportunity for self-reflection and learning. I don't believe this happened in these two cases. But I also don't believe I am the sole determinant of the purpose or that my hopes are the only valid or useful outcomes. I appreciate that each may have felt some satisfaction and am glad they may have gotten something from it. Whether anything more happened for them, I cannot know—or control.

Finally, in Chapter 1, I described how alienation became important to me and what I think led me connect to similar themes that emerged as I talked with the

members of the OD SIG. I came to the OD SIG still somewhat thinking of myself as taking a “critical” perspective. That hasn’t changed really, but the intentional distancing I had done as a result of that has changed. What I have written about “starting at home” and about being an “insider” I have framed in this dissertation as contributing to the quality of the research. I must admit, however, that here these concepts are more retrospectively applied than it would seem. I know that I did not start out looking for anything “close to home.” I started out looking for anything compelling. That what I found compelling was also “close to home” may have been inevitable, but it was not intentional. Being an “insider” was even more serendipitous than starting close to home. Every assumption and pre-disposition I had when I entered this group compelled me to be cautious and suspicious, to view myself as an outsider. About the only thing I can take credit for is being open to surprises. Making me an insider is something that it seems the group did to me, not something I endeavored to make happen. Later, by welcoming and engaging me in the ways I described above, I came not only to feel that they accepted me, but to feel myself that I belonged in the group. If I had maintained my defenses, or been so far removed from what OD SIG is about I doubt that they would not have succeeded in bringing me in. Most of my success in this research I attribute to them. All I contributed was readiness to recognize and accept invitations to dialogue when they came.

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